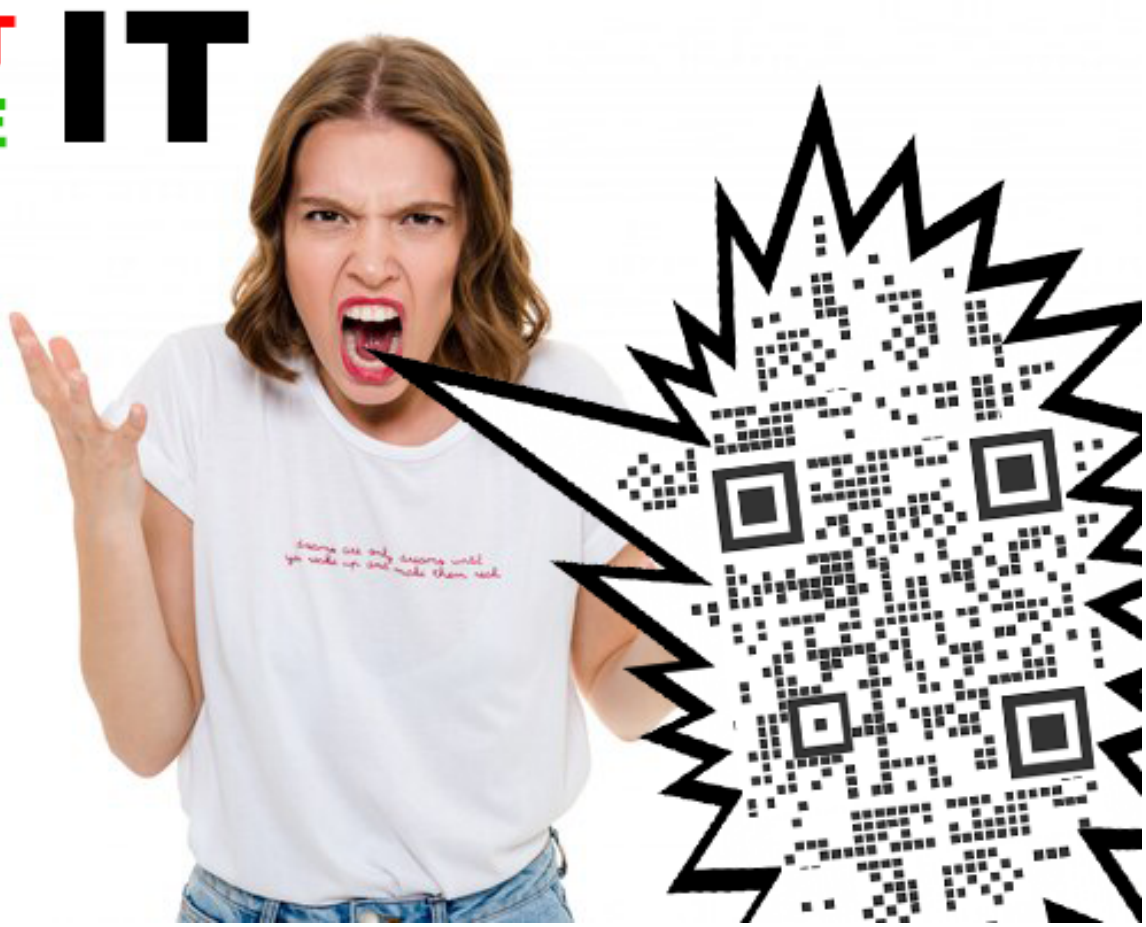
kalidasa's trilogy

- Meghadootam
- Kumarasambhavam
- Raghuvamsham

Dipavali Debroy

SHOUT IT
SHARE



Kalidasa's Trilogy

Kalidasa's Trilogy

Dipavali Debroy

Smriti Books®
New Delhi INDIA

ISBN No: 81-87967-70-6

First Edition : 2005

©Smriti Books®

Paintings courtesy: National Museum, New Delhi, India

Published by

SMRITI BOOKS®

An imprint of

SPB Enterprises Pvt. Ltd

Registered office

124, Siddharth Enclave, New Delhi - 110014, India

Works

B-219, Sector - 31, Noida 201303, U.P., India

Email:smritibooks@indiatimes.com

Printed in India

By Excel Printer Pvt. Ltd.

C-206 Naraina Phase-1, New Delhi-110 028 (INDIA)

To my grandmother
Swarnaprabha Sen,
who taught me
to love Sanskrit

The month of Sravan

Contents

Introduction	ix
Meghadootam	1
Kumarasambhavam	31
Raghuvamsham	75
Glossary	112

Introduction

Even the twenty-first century admires Kalidasa, the renowned poet of ancient India, who composed in Sanskrit the highly-rated works *Meghadootam, Kumarasambhava, Raghuvamsham, Abhigyanashakuntalam, Malavikagnimitram,* and *Vikramorvashiyam.*

But unlike most Sanskrit poets, he did not speak about himself in his works. Most of the information on him is folklore rather than history.

His time and place

Kalidasa is supposed to have been the court-poet of Raja Vikramaditya of Ujjaini, one of the *navaratna* (nine gems) the king had as his courtiers.

In his works, Kalidasa described landmarks of Ujjaini (like the temple of Mahakala and the river Sipra) with enthusiasm, and made eulogistic references to the name 'Vikrama'. Along with wonderful descriptions of nature, his work shows great familiarity with urban living, especially in palaces and courts. But 'Vikramaditya' is a title rather than a name and there have been many kings in Indian history with the title of 'Vikramaditya'. Which Vikramaditya should Kalidasa be dated by?

Some scholars put him in the court of a Vikramaditya whose rule commenced in 56 BC and who is the founder of the Vikram era, and would not place Kalidasa beyond the 1st century, AD.

Some think that Kalidasa's Vikramaditaya was Yashodharmadeva, the king of Malava in the 6th century, AD. Others argue that Kalidasa's works reflect the heyday of the Gupta period (300-650 AD) and there was more than one Gupta king with the title of Vikramaditya and one of these must have been Kalidasa's Vikramaditya. What we do know for sure is that the Aihole inscription of 634 AD mentions Kalidasa by name and the Mandasor inscription of 472 AD seems to borrow from Kalidasa. These set a lower limit to Kalidasa.

Kalidasa depicted not only Ujjaini, but a host of other places in northern India, especially the Himalayas. He must have traveled a lot, and loved doing it. He had known the smell of the freshly ploughed earth as well as that of the sap of coniferous trees. He had seen peacocks dance in the forest to the clap of thunder, as well as in the palace, to the jingle of ladies' bangles.

His life – or legend?

The story goes that Kalidasa in his youth was ignorant and inarticulate. Princess Kamala, who was highly educated and very proud of being so, had announced that she would marry only someone who could get the better of her in a learned discourse.

Two learned men, defeated at her hands, decided to teach her a lesson by tricking her into marrying someone really stupid. They found a man on a tree cutting off the very branch he was sitting upon. Asking him not to open his mouth before the princess, but answer only in signs, they presented him at the court as a very learned scholar. By a combination of his gestures and their interpretations, Kalidasa won the debate without even saying a word.

Princess Kamala happily married him, but right on the wedding night, a camel (*ushtra* in Sanskrit) called out outside their bedroom. Coyly the princess asked, "O husband, what is that?"

Instead of any clever discourse, Kalidasa came out with "*Ushta*".

"What did you say?" cried the princess, in disbelief that a learned scholar could not even pronounce the word correctly.

Realizing that he had made some sort of a blunder, Kalidasa tried to correct himself by saying "*Utra*, *Utra*."

This was no scholar, the princess realized. She threw Kalidasa out and went into depression. Kalidasa made every effort to educate himself and cure any speech defects that he had.

Roaming in the forest and praying to deities, he received the blessings of the goddess Kali (Sarasvati, according to some). From a dullard who could not even pronounce Sanskrit words correctly, he became transformed into the poet Kalidasa, one who serves Kali).

With his new-found literary gifts, he went knocking at Kamala's door again.

"Who is it", she asked.

"*Asti kashchit vakvishesha* (someone specially gifted with words is here)", came the reply and Kamala realized that her husband had come back a changed man. She then requested him to compose literary pieces, each beginning with one of the four words that Kalidasa has used.

Kalidasa began *Kumarasambhavam* with '*asti*', *Meghadootam* with '*kaschit*' and his *Raghuvamsham* with '*vak*', but possibly could not keep it up any further. There is no work of his that begins with '*vishesha*'.

Apart from these three poetical works, he wrote three famous plays: *Abhigyanashakuntalam, Vikramorvashiyam* and *Malavikagnimitram*. There are other works that are said to be his, but are really imitations. Minor poets of later times have often tried to pass off their works in his name. But Kalidasa's poetry is

so distinctive that they have not really succeeded. Works that unquestionably bear his stamp are the six mentioned at the outset.

In spite of Kalidasa's becoming a court-poet, there is no account of how his end came. But the legend is that he was murdered by a courtesan in Ceylon (Srilanka), whose king Kumaradasa was a friend of his.

Kalidasa – his style and sources

Except for *Meghadootam*, which is all-original, *Abhigyana-shakuntalam*, *Kumarasambhavam* and *Raghuvamsham* are drawn from even older sources, like *Mahabharata, Ramayana, Brahma-Purana, Kalika-Purana, Shiva Purana.* Even *Malavikagnimitram* and *Vikramorvashiyam* have references to mythology and history.

Kalidasa's works are free from involved constructions, forced witticisms and worn-out similes. His style is simple and sweet, his observations original, and his imagery fresh. His mastery of various rhythmic patterns makes him a delight to read and recite. He strikes the right balance between melody and majesty. If, out of all these qualities, any one is to be singled out as his specialty, that would be his similes, or as the old Sanskrit phrase goes, "*upama Kalidasasya…*". Their aptness and originality are unrivalled.

But more important than any stylistics, it is the human quality in Kalidasa's works, that is his hallmark.

The descriptions of Nature in *Meghadootam* are superb, but what makes them all the more remarkable is that they are seen through a film of human emotions felt by a creature – the Yaksha – who is superhuman or mythical.

Even when Kalidasa drew upon existing sources, he made them undergo a transformation, a trans-creation. He filled out the bare outlines of legendary or historical sources. On their foun-

dations he built splendid structures of his poetic imagination. Shakuntala's story is there in Vedavyasa's *Mahabharata*, but narrated in the impersonal, aloof manner of great epic literature. When Kalidasa retells it, his focus is on the personal elements, the intimate feelings.

In *Kumarasambhavavam*, when Kalidasa takes us through the story of Shiva and Parvati getting wed, he brings out the human emotions in a way the *Puranas* did not. He depicts Himalaya as the father of a young marriageable daughter, keen to get Shiva for his son-in-law, but too self-respecting to broach the topic himself. He depicts his wife as a mother who longs for her daughter's wedding right from her childhood, but sheds tears when the day actually arrives. Parvati he presents as a young girl used to her looks being praised, who gets a big shock when she finds Shiva above beauty that is not spiritual but only physical. What is more, Kalidasa imbues the great Shiva – one of the main godheads of the Hindu trinity – with very human qualities. Having made Parvati undergo rigorous penance to raise her spiritual level, he has to try to bring her back to the level when he can win a smile from her, and ultimately, her favours. In the process, he has to descend to making his ghostly attendants make ghastly faces at her, take her on a honeymoon trip, and eventually make her drunk!

In *Raghuvamsham*, Kalidasa takes us through generations of a particular royal family, the Suryavamsha or Solar dynasty. He describes conquests and governance, but more than that, the pain of having no son and heir that Dilipa and Dasharatha have to experience, and of subjugating personal feelings to public opinion that Rama had to do. It shows how every scion of the family cannot be equally strong. It demonstrates how a once-glorious dynastic rule came to a sorry end. But it also leaves posterity a chance to believe in the revival of this family in particular and the strength of family-line in general. It is not a chronicle of kings; it is a story of human interest.

The play *Vikramorvashiyam* is about the love of a mortal for an immortal – the celestial nymph Urvashi. It is best known for a scene in which King Vikrama wanders through a forest, apostrophizing flowers and plants as if they were his vanished love. *Malavikagnimitram*, the third of Kalidasa's plays, is a playful intrigue among royal ladies, without any great purpose, but nevertheless an accomplished piece of work.

Kalidasa – his universality and eternity

Kalidasa enjoyed great popularity in his own time, and was exalted by later Sanskrit poets such as Banabhatta, Kumarila, Govindacharya and Jayadeva. In more recent times, Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore was an admirer of Kalidasa, and Bengali literature in general owes a lot to Kalidasa's Sanskrit.

In the West, Kalidasa has been admired by Goethe, Humboldt,Schlegel, Max Mueller, Sir William Jones, and Sir Monier-Williams. In 1955, the World Peace Council in Vienna called on all people to pay tribute to Kalidasa in 1956.

But how did Kalidasa go west? Walter Rubens *(Kalidasa, The Human Meaning of his Works*, first published in Berlin in 1957, translated and reprinted in India in 1984) has this to say:

"In 1789, just at the outbreak of the French Revolution, Sir William Jones (who became the judge at the Supreme Court of Bengal in 1783) published an English prose translation of *Abhigyanashakuntalam*. He demonstrated to an astonished Europe that ancient India had known the drama or the stage-play, and compared Kalidasa to the great English poet and dramatist, Shakespeare."

In 1791, George Forster, the Mainz Jacobin (revolutionary democrats revolting against big landowners and big bourgeoisie in France) produced his German prose translation of Jone's English version of *Abhigyanashakuntalam*. He sent a copy to Goethe, who was inspired to comment:

"Wouldst thou the young year's blossoms and the fruits of its decline,

And all by which the soul is charmed, enraptured, feasted, fed?

Wouldst thou the earth and heaven itself in one sole name combine?

I name thee, O Shakuntala, and all at once is said."

It does not really matter that Kalidasa cannot be dated and placed exactly. He belongs to all times and the whole world.

And that is why, though several translations and adaptations already exist, here is yet another, of his three poetical works – to enable contemporary world-citizens to take a fresh look at Kalidasa.

MEGHADOOTAM

Waiting for her beloved

Introducing Meghadootam

The most romantic of Indian poetry to date, *Meghadootam* (literally, cloud-messenger) is a petition or prayer by a Yaksha to a cloud to act as his messenger.

The Yakshas are not quite men and not quite gods. They are mythical creatures who serve Kubera or Dhanapati, the treasurer of the gods. Because they keep secret guard over treasure, they are also called Guhyakas. As depicted in temple carvings, they are squat, stocky creatures. Before the Reserve Bank of India building in Delhi, there stand a Yaksha couple, sculpted by the famous modern sculptor Ramkinkara Beij. Solid, sturdy, they guard India's central bank as they were thought to have guarded Kubera's treasury. The association of Yakshas is thus with money and finance, and vigilance.

But in *Meghadootam*, Kalidasa depicted Yakshas as sensitive creatures living in luxury and whiling away their spare time in amorous recreations. In any case, of course, as Kalidasa, says, monsoon clouds charge even the most unlikely characters with romance.

While *mahakavya* or epic literature has various aspects specified by tradition, *Meghadootam* is a *khandakavya* or short work of literature, a piece of sustained lyric poetry. It is written uniformly in a *chhanda* or metre known as the *mandakranta* and consists of 121 verses or shlokas in two parts, *Poorvamegha* and *Uttaramegha*, of 66 and 55 verses respectively. *Poorvamegha,* the former part, is about the route the Cloud-messenger is to take in order to reach the destination, the fabulous city of Alaka atop the mountain Kailasa.

Uttaramegha, the latter part, is about what he is to do after reaching Alaka.

The first five verses of the *Poorvamegha* say how a *megha* or cloud came to be conceived as a *doota* or messenger.

A certain Yaksha neglected his work and was banished from Alaka to the earth. He stayed all alone on Ramgiri, a certain peak of the Vindhya mountains, but at the end of about eight months, found his solitude intolerable. The first cloud of monsoon appeared and at the sight he was compelled to give expression to his loneliness and longing for the wife he had left behind. In his imagination, he saw the cloud traveling north to Alaka, where his wife was, and delivering a message from him.

The rest of the work, the *poorva* as well as the *uttara* parts, are a direct address to the cloud, conceived of as a sentient creature.

Verses 6-11of *Poorvamegha* are an appeal to the Cloud's nobility of birth and generosity of disposition, and the promise that his task is not really going to be a boring or unpleasant one. There would be a pleasant wind, and sights to see, as well as traveling-companions in the form of geese flying north.

Verse 12 onwards, the Yaksha incites the Cloud to soar up from his present position and proceed – on a route which he describes enticingly – so that the Cloud feels motivated to be his messenger. The Cloud is to travel to the woody hill of Amrakoota, rest a little and then proceed across the Vindhya mountains where he would come upon the thin stream of Narmada. The Cloud is to rain occasionally, making all nature burst forth in leaves and flowers, buds and shoots. He is to travel across the country of Dasharna, visit its famous capital Vidisha, draw upon the waters of the river Vetravati, and then take some rest upon Nichaih hills.

Although it would be a detour, the Cloud is then asked to visit Ujjaini, a splendid city with temples, gardens, palaces and pretty women. Refreshed, he is asked to proceed to Devagiri, the abode of Kumara or Skanda, the army-chief of gods (whose birth forms the theme of *Kumarasambhavam*).

The Cloud is then advised to cross the river Charmanvati to the region of Dashapura, proceeding next to the battleground of Kurukshetra (where the Mahabharata war took place). Replenishing his stock with the waters of the river Sarasvati, the Cloud should then move to the sacred river Ganga descending from the peaks of the Himalayas. Resting himself among the flora and fauna of the snowy Himalayas, the Cloud should then move north to reach the mountain Kailasa, upon which stands Alaka, the destination of the journey.

The Yaksha is in such a state that he seizes upon a cloud in the sky as a means of communicating with his wife. But he never forgets that his messenger has to be provided rest and refreshment, and lured on with prospects of a pleasant journey and a spectacular sight at the end of it.

Again, in describing this journey, Kalidasa, through the Yaksha, has provided with delicate details of the history, geography and culture of ancient India.

The first 14 verses of the *Uttaramegha* describe Alaka, which, it must be remembered, is a mythical city peopled by mythical creatures, unlike Ujjaini or Vidisha described earlier. Alaka is a splendid city, were there is perennial youth and all wishes come true.

Verses 15-21describe the Yaksha's own house in the city – grand but desolate without its master. He nostalgically recalls its gate, its pool, the trees his wife planted, and even, its bird-perch. But it is not just homesickness; these details are provided so that the Cloud can correctly identify the house where he is to deliver his message.

In verses 22-36, Yaksha talks about his own wife. With longing, he goes over her physical details, which are exquisite. But what is remarkable is his unshaken faith in her fidelity. He has no doubt that the Coud will find her thin and miserable, taking no interest in her appearance or in any other pleasure except dreaming of him. However, he does not want the Cloud to take any undue advantage of her. He takes care to refer to her as 'your friend'. In the *Poorvamegha* too, he had referred to her as the Cloud's "brother's wife" or sister-in-law.

In verses 37-52, the Yaksha instructs the Cloud how the message is to be delivered so as not to alarm or shock, but to comfort and cheer. Waiting till the wife gets up naturally, rumbling rather than thundering, the Cloud is to tell the Yaksha's wife that her husband was safe and sound, and completely loyal to her. She should take heart and look forward to their reunion, once the term of the curse was over – in about four more months.

The last two verses (53-55) beg the Cloud to get back with a reply for the Yaksha from his wife. This last line specifically is an *ashirvachana* or 'words of blessing', wishing that the Cloud be spared any pangs of separation from his consort, the Lightning. It rounds up the long speech made to the Cloud in the sky, and brings us back to the earth – where the exiled Yaksha stands, as lonely as ever.

Poorvamegha

Poorvamegha begins by describing the context.

1. A certain Yaksha had erred in discharging his prescribed duties. He was cursed by his master (Kubera) and banished for a year. His power and glory gone, he lived in a hermitage atop the hill Ramagiri (Ramtek now), which was cooled by shadowy trees and hallowed by springs where Sita, Janaka's daughter (and, of course, Rama's wife) had bathed. His curse was heavier because of the separation from his wife or consort, the Yakshi.

2. Torn apart from the woman of his desire, he bore it out on that hilltop for eight months and grew so thin that his gold bangle slipped off his wrist. Then on the first day of the monsoon month of *Ashadha*, he saw the grand sight of a cloud clinging to the slope of the hill – like an elephant bent down in a game of rubbing its body against a bank or a tree.

3. On witnessing that interesting sight, the Yaksha thought for a long time, his tears held back. Even those who are happy become a little unmindful upon seeing clouds; not to speak of someone who is far away from the beloved whom he wants to caress.

4. When the monsoon month of *Navas* (*Shravana*) neared, the Yaksha wanted to extend his wife's life. (As revealed by *Uttaramegha*, the Yaksha was sure the Yakshi was pining for him as well.) So on seeing the cloud in the sky, he had the impulse of sending news of his own wellbeing through the cloud. Arranging an offering of hill-flowers, he happily greeted the cloud with pleasant words.

5. A cloud is an assortment of vapour, rays, water and air, hardly something that can serve the purpose of carrying messages. Discounting this in his enthusiasm, the Yaksha made his request to the cloud. Those hurting with desire are naturally incapable of distinguishing between the animate and the inanimate.

Now begins the Yaksha's speech to the cloud, asking it to be a messenger to Alaka, where the Yakshi is.

6. "I know you to be born of the world-famous cloud family of Pushkaravartakas. (Pushkaravartaka can also mean a whirlpool of water.) You are the chief official of Maghavan (Indra), and one who can assume different forms at will. This is why I – who, due to ill-fortune, happen to be far away from my wife – pray to you. A prayer to a superior person, even if futile, is better than a successful one made to an inferior person.

7. O Cloud, O giver of water! You are the refuge of harassed ones. Carry my news – separated from my wife by Kubera's anger. The place you should go to is named Alaka. It is the habitation of the lordly Yakshas. Shiva stays in its outer-garden and its mansions are awash with the light from the crescent-moon on Shiva's head.

8. As you ride up the path of the wind, wives of men who are on the roads will look up at you, moving their untied hair away from their faces by holding up the ends. (In the Indian tradition, women whose husbands are away are not supposed to do their hair or dress up until the husbands return.) They will be reassured at your sight, because of their confidence (that their husbands will soon return to them in this rainy season, as they have done in the past). With you at your work, who will ignore his wife, suffering in separation, when he has freedom of movement? That is, something I do not have. (Otherwise, the Yaksha would have gone to visit the Yakshi, without a messenger being needed.)

9. And you too – proceeding without hitches – will see your sister-in-law – who is wife to only one person (that is, loyal to me) – safe and sound – keenly counting the days (to our re-union). The bond of hope often holds together the loving hearts of women, like flowers whose petals are about to fall.

10.The wind, blowing softly in the direction you will take, will send you along. On your left, the joyful *chataka* bird will sweetly sing. *balakas* (cranes) – strung together like garlands in the sky – will serve you - a pleasant sight for the eyes. For, they know how pleasant the moment of conception can be (clouds were believed to impregnate cranes).

11.That roar of yours can make the earth conceive and sprout mushrooms. It is good fortune to hear it, and on doing so, the *rajahamsas* (swans) – keen on flying up to Lake Manasa with bits of lotus-stalks and shoots as their provisions – will be your travel-companions in the sky – up to Mount Kailasa.

12.That tall mountain has its slopes imprinted with Rama's revered feet. (Rama is thought to have stayed at Ramtek.) From time to time, there is contact between the two of you, and, as expressions of its affection, the mountain sheds hot tears born of long separation. (This refers to the mountain's emitting warm vapours in contact with the cloud.) Take leave of it.

13.O Cloud, giver of water! Now hear all about the route from me. It is a route which is quite worthy for you to travel by, resting your foot on the mountain-peaks as and when tired and enjoying the light, clear water from the springs as and when exhausted . (This refers to the cloud shedding some rainwater occasionally.) After that, you will hear about the message (that you are to take) which too, is a fit drink for the ears.

14.From this place, succulent with canes, rise up to the sky with your face towards the north. As you do so, the simple-minded womenfolk of the Siddhas will start and turn up their faces to look at you, wondering if the wind was robbing the mountain of its peak. On the way, avoid any rough handling from the Dingnagas (mythical elephants governing the four directions).

15.Before you, the arc of Akhandala's (Indra's) bow, that is, the rainbow, will emerge out of the top of the anthill. (This is an old Indian idea.) It is a sight worthy to behold – like the mix of the glow of various jewels. It will enhance the beauty of your dark body, just like the peacock-feather enhances that of Krishna (Vishnu in the form of the cowherd).

16. The outcome of agriculture depends on you. So the village-women will drink you in with their eyes – soft with affection and innocent of coquettish lifting of eyebrows. In that state, climb up to the plateau-land, fragrant with the earth just turned up by the plough. Then, roam a little to the west, becoming, as it were, lighter, and then – travel north again.

17. Its forest-fire quenched by your showers, the hill Amrakuta (Amarkantak now) will happily bear you on its crest when you are tired out by the journey. Not to speak of a great man, even a petty man does not turn away a friend who comes for shelter as the return of a previous favour.

18. You resemble a soft, dark braid. The mountain has its slopes covered by mango-groves glowing with ripe mangoes. When you mount its peak, it will look like the breast of the earth, dark in the middle and pale as it stretches away. It will be a sight fit for a pair of immortals to behold.

19. Tarry a moment in that grove enjoyed by the wives of forest-people. Making offerings of water (i.e., raining a little), become lighter and so, faster. Then cross the road beyond. You will see the thin stream of Reva (Narmada) stretched out at the pebble-roughened feet of the Vindhya mountain – like devotional patterns traced out in decorating an elephant's body.

20. After vomiting some rain, go, taking some water from this Reva – water that is scented with the bitter secretion of elephants and obstructed by *jamun*-groves. O Cloud! The breeze will not be able to lift you when you have substance in you. All those who have nothing in them are light; fullness contributes to gravity.

21. The bees will be observing the *nipa* (*kadamba* trees, flowering only in the rains), yellow-brown with pollen of half-blooms. The deer will be eating the first buds of *kandali* (a small plant with red flowers, which blossom only in the monsoon) from the watery banks. The elephants will smell the strong odour of the damp earth. They will show you the way.

22. The Siddhas will be out with their dear companions, gazing at the *chatakas*, which are clever at catching drops of rainwater (straight

from the clouds) and in counting and pointing out the *balakas* (cranes) which are arranged in successive lines. At the clap of thunder, the companions will get startled and clasp the Siddhas in quick embraces. The Siddhas will then show you their respect.

23. O friend! Although you want to go fast for doing me a pleasant service, I can foresee that you will be losing time on every mountain fragrant with *kakubha* (*kutaja*) flowers. Pray, travel fast somehow, resisting the shrieking welcome of the peacocks, with their white-ringed eyes filled with happy tears (at your arrival).

24. By the time you are near it, Dasharna (literally a region with ten forts or battlements; possibly the present State of Chhattisgarh) will have its garden-hedges pale with *ketaka* flowers; their pointed, needle-like tips split open, and the roadside trees of the village in a hubbub with domestic birds (like crows and pigeons, which feed upon offerings from households) beginning to build their nests. Its *jambu* (*jamun*) forests will be dark green at the edge with fruit that is ripe and hanging down. The swans will stop there for a few days.

25. Immediately upon reaching the city named Vidisha, the capital (of Dasharna region), well-known in all the quarters, your amorous nature will be fully rewarded when you drink the tasty water of the river Vetravati. The running waves will make the water resemble a face that charmingly moves its eyebrows as you thunder pleasantly along the edges of her banks.

26. You should take some rest there on the low hill named Nichaih, which with its mature blossoms of *kadamba*, will appear to be thrilled at your touch. The rocky caves of this hill emit perfumes used by women who sell themselves and so broadcast the rampant youth of the townsmen (possibly citizens of Vidisha who come to make use of those caves).

27. Once rested, move on. Sprinkle the buds of *juthika* (*jasmine*) growing on the banks of forest-streams with drops of fresh water. Women will be picking flowers, sweating, wiping off the sweat on their cheeks, brushing against the lotuses in their ears, and so

crushing them. By providing them shade, make a temporary acquaintance with them.

28. Even though this will make your route circuitous, proceed towards the northern direction; do not be averse to making love to the laps of the white-washed mansions of Ujjaini (Ujjain now). You will be missing something if you do not entertain yourself with the eyes of the women of that town. These eyes roll at the corners and startle, at the bursts of continuous lightning.

29. On your way you will come across the river Nirvindhya (also named Sindhu). She wears a waist-band of birds in a row, crying at the disturbance caused by waves. She glides on, stumbling prettily (as if drunk), and displaying her navel – the eddies. Take her juices within you (i.e., absorb water from the river). For, the first expressions of a woman's love are her amorous gestures.

30. O Cloud, you fortunate one! The river (now the name Sindhu is used instead of Nirvindhya) has become a thin, single stream of water, yellow in colour because of dry leaves that have fallen from the trees on its banks. (The suggestion is that it has become like a woman in separation, thin, pale, and with a single plait of hair.) She lies there, indicating your past good fortune (i.e., it was favoured by you in the past) by its (present) lovelorn state. You should now adopt methods that will make that river get out of its emaciated state. (That is, you should – as you have done in the past – rain upon the river.)

31. The region Avanti contains village elders knowledgeable about the tale of Udayana (the king of the country of Vatsa, the hero of an ancient tale of bravery and romance). On reaching it, proceed to the city Vishala, that is *vishala* or great in wealth and prosperity. It is like a bright piece of heaven which has been wrested down by the merits remaining, once the ones who had stayed in heaven had returned to the earth upon depletion of the fruits of their good conduct.

32. There, the morning breeze blowing from the river Sipra carries across the sweet, intoxicated indistinct cooing of *sarasas* (cranes), and the fragrance of full-blown lotuses. It is agreeable to the

body, and removes the fatigue of love-sport from women, like a lover, fawning and cajoling.

33. In the shops (of Vishala) are displayed crores of pearl-strings, with pendants of gems, conch-shells and oyster-shells, pieces of coral, and dark green emeralds with rays like shoots of grass. It seems as though the oceans must have only water left in them.

34. There, informed people entertain friends who are visiting (by pointing out to them) - "It is here that Udayana, the king of Vatsa, carried away the darling daughter of Pradyot", "Here there used to be the grove of golden *tala* trees", "It is here that the elephant Nalagiri spiritedly uprooted the pillar to which it had been tied and went on a rampage".

35. Fragrant vapours of hair-wash spewing out of latticed windows will add to you dimensions. Pet peacocks, out of their affection for a friend, will present you with a dance. You will be able to look upon the prosperity of those mansions, scented with flowers and marked with the red of the ladies' feet. By such means, get rid of the fatigue of the journey.

36. Proceed to the temple of Shiva, Chandi's husband and the lord of the three worlds. Its garden is fanned by winds from the stream Gandhavati, carrying the fragrance of lotus-pollen, and of material used by women bathing and sporting in water. The Ganas (Shiva's attendants) will gaze at you with awe as you are the colour of their master's neck. (Shiva's neck is blue-grey because of the poison he had drunk.)

37. On reaching the temple, which is named Mahakala, even if it is some time other than the evening, you should stay there till the sun can no longer be seen, and perform the noble task of beating the drum in the evening's ceremonial worship. Your roars and rumbles will be fully rewarded.

38. Dancing-girls serving at the temple will have their girdles tinkling, as they do their footwork on the ground. Their arms will be tired from gracefully waving *chamara*s (whisks) with bejeweled handles. Those tired arms will also bear scratches from (their

lovers') nails. As drops of rain fall on those scratches, they get a soothing sensation, and release sidelong glances at you – which look like long rows of bees.

39. Shiva had once killed the demon Gaja (Naga), who had the form of an elephant (*gaja naga*). He had stripped off the hide, and afterwards, when the mood got into him, flung it over his shoulders and danced about wildly waving his many hands, blood dripping from the elephant-hide trophy. Bhavani (Parvati, Gauri, Chandi) felt agitated every time Shiva did so. O Cloud! You should, in a rounded form, rest on the forest of Shiva's many upraised arms, assuming an evening glow, red as the newly-blown *jaba* (*japa*, hibiscus) flower. Shedding a few drops of water and at the very beginning of the dance, you should rob Shiva of his wish for the elephant's hide. You will see the pleasure and satisfaction in the eyes of Bhavani, quiet at her agitation being assuaged.

40. At night, the women in Ujjaini will be going to the residences of their lovers, along the main roads where the light is obstructed and the darkness so dense that it can be pricked by a needle. Show them the way with flashes of lightning that are like streaks of pure gold on the touchstone. But do not give them scares; do not thunder or rain upon them.

41. Your consort, the lightning, will be worn out by flashing for so long. Then, spend the night on the top terrace of some mansion, where pigeons will be sleeping. But, as soon as you see the sun, carry on with the rest of your journey. One should not slow down while executing the tasks of friends.

42. This is the time when the tears of women who had been deserted are to be assuaged by lovers. So quickly leave the path of the sun, who can get angry at your obstructing his *kara* (which means both rays and hands), as he returns to dry the tears from lotus-like faces – the dew on the lotuses.

43. Even though in the form of a shadow, you – who is naturally pleasant – will gain entry into the waters of the river Gambhira, as into her placid mind. Hence, it will not be fitting for you to

render futile her glances – the flitting of the coquettish Shaphara fish, white like lotuses

44. You will be robbing the river of her blue drapes – the waters – baring her hips and nether parts. The branches of Vanira-cane growing by the riverside will seem to be holding on to them a little. O Friend! How will it be possible for you to move on – hanging over her as you do? Who, once he has got the taste of a woman with her thighs spread out, is able to leave her?

45. (But) a cool breeze will blow. Charmed by its contact with the smell rushing out of the earth you have sprinkled upon, elephants snorting pleasantly, will draw it in through their trunks. Orchards of *udumbara* (fig) will be ripening and bending under it. Such a breeze will gently propel you – who will want to go to Devagiri (possibly the village of Devgad to the south-west of Jhansi, and the site of a temple to Skanda or Kartikeya).

46. Skanda is a permanent resident there. For the purpose of protecting Indra's army, Shiva stored his energy – brighter than the sun – in the mouth of Agni. Skanda is that energy. Transform yourself into a cloud of flowers. (The cloud has been called Kamarupa earlier, because it can change form at will.) Give a bath to Skanda with flowers wet with the waters of the Ganga that flows in the sky (the celestial river Alakananda).

47. Afterwards, make that peacock of Pavaki's dance. (Skanda, called Pavaki because he was born from fire into which Shiva had cast his energies, rides on a peacock.) Its feathers are ringed in glowing lines. When one of them falls out naturally, Bhavani (Shiva's consort and Kartikeya's mother), out of affection for her son, places it in her ear in preference to lotus-petals. The peacock's outer eyes are washed white by the ray from the moon on Shiva's head. Heightening your thunder by resorting to the hill and so making it reverberate, attend to Skanda's peacock.

48. Once you have paid your respects to Skanda, who was born from a clump of reeds (where Shiva's energies had been dumped), ride across some distance. Siddha-couples, carrying *veenas* (lutes), will move out of your way because of their fear of rain-

drops. Hang down then, desiring to honour the deed of Rantideva – the slaughter of cows – Surabhi's daughters. That has developed into the form of a river on earth. (Rantideva, an ancient king, is said to have performed a huge sacrifice killing, and stripping the hides of many cows – creating a river of blood – often identified with the river Charmanvati in the Chambal area. Cows are said to be born from the celestial cow Surabhi.)

49. As you – who has stolen the complexion of Sharngin (Krishna) – bend to take water from that river which, though wide, appears slim because of the distance to sky-borne creatures, the river will look like the earth's single string of pearl, with a large sapphire at the centre.

50. Rise above that river Charmanvati. The housewives of Dashapura have eyes which are well-acquainted with beguiling movements of the eyebrows, and which glow like the *krishnasara* (black-and-white streaked deer) when the eyelashes are thrown up, and discharge beauty like (black) bees flying after tossed-up *kunda* (small white flowers) blossoms. Make yourself an object of curiosity for such eyes.

51. Casting your shadow upon the habitation of Brahmavarta, resort to the grounds (*kshetra*) of the Kauravas (i.e., Kurukshetra). This indicates the massacre of Kshatriyas. With hundreds of sharp arrows, Arjuna, the bearer of the bow named Gandiva, rained down on the heads of royal personages, like you with your showers rain lotuses.

52. You pleasant one, the Cloud! Make use of the waters of the river Sarasvati, and you too will become internally pure, remaining dark only in complexion. The plough-holder (Balaram, Krishna's elder brother) who had been averse to the battle out of his regard for friends, drank those waters, discarding his favourite wine, which had reflected his wife Revati's eyes as she had served it to him.

53. From there (Kurukshetra), you should go to the daughter of the sage Jahnu (Jahnavi or the river Ganga). Ganga has descended from the lord of the mountains (Himalaya) beyond the mountain Kankhala,

and provided Sagara's sons a stairway to heaven. (King Sagara was on his hundredth horse-sacrifice when Indra stole his horse and hid it away. Sagara had 60,000 sons who searched high and low for the horse, and finally located it underground – near the hermitage of sage Kapila, When they accused Kapila of being the thief, he cursed them, reducing them to ashes – which could be conveyed to heaven only if washed by the waters of the river Ganga, which in those times, flowed only in heaven. Sagara's great-grandson Bhagiratha practiced great austerities to persuade the celestial river to change course and descend to earth and flow underground across the area where the ashes of his ancestors lay. Once Ganga did so, the souls of the 60,000 princes ascended to heaven.) Ganga has caught hold of Shiva's hair, (even) touching with her waves (acting as hands) the crescent moon on it. It is as though she is laughing through her foam, at the curves of Gauri's frowns. (To break the fall of Ganga's descent, Shiva had provided a support with his head full of matted hair. Ganga is thus regarded as a wife of Shiva, and co-wife to Gauri, who certainly had not been pleased at Ganga getting such an exalted position on her husband's revered head.)

54. If you hang in the sky by your hind parts, and – at a slant – drink those crystal-clear waters (of the Ganga), you will resemble an elephant of the gods. If you glide along the current, the clear waters of the Ganga, by means of your reflection, will seem to reach its pleasant confluence with dark waters of the Yamuna at a place other than the right one, Prayaga.

55. The mountain of Ganga's origin is snowy, and smells of the musk deer squatting on it. On reaching it, remove the fatigue of the journey by resting on its peak. You will look as glorious as a mound of earth turned up by Trinayana's (Shiva's) white bull.

56. When the wind blows, the shoulders of the Sarala trees may rub against one another and generate forest-fire (wild-fire), the sparks of which may be thrown on to the load of hair on *chamari* cattle and set them afire. Quench such wildfire by showering in thousands of streams. Indeed, the riches of the great are for redressing distress.

57. You leave the way free for the Sharabha deer (these are mythical deer, with eight legs, four growing upwards from their backs).

But, out of anger, they may quickly get up and try to jump over you – only to get their own bodies broken. Scatter them away with a tremendous shower of hail. Anyone set on a futile effort is bound to become ridiculous.

58. The footfall of Ardhendumoili (Shiva bearing the crescent moon) is clearly marked on that rock. Siddhas constantly bring it offerings. When their sensory organs are gone, those who have shown it respect rise above their sins to reach the permanent posts of Ganas (attendants of gods). (O Cloud!) Bending reverentially, circumambulate it.

59. The clumps of *kichaka* bamboos, as they are filled by the breeze, will sound sweetly. The Kinnara-women (associated with music and dancing) will sing of the conquest of Tripura (three forts conquered by Shiva) in a chorus. Your thunder – resounding in the caves – will be like the drum or tabour, and musical arrangements for Pashupati (Shiva) will indeed be complete.

60. Crossing the various wonders of the foothills of the Pralayadri (Himalaya), proceed north, using the hole in the hill named Krouncha. This forms the gateway of the swans (as they fly to Manasa) and the path of glory for the noble Bhrigu, Parasurama. (It was Parasurama from the family of the Bhrigus who pierced this hole in the hill by shooting an arrow into it.) You will move at a slant and look as splendid as the dark foot of Vishnu raised to press Bali down. (Bali was a demon oppressing the gods, finally brought under control by Vishnu.)

61. Soaring high (after coming out of the Krouncha hole), you should be the guest of the mountain Kailasa, which the wives of the gods use for their mirror. It stands, filling the sky with its peaks. The peaks have been loosened at their joints by Dashamukha's arms (Ravana or Dashamukha had tried to carry it off to Lanka and Shiva had pressed him down, mountain and all). They are white like outspread lotuses and like Shiva's loud laughter, piled up from day to day.

62. I can anticipate the beauty of the mountain as you approach its slopes. You have the cool glow of crushed collyrium. The moun-

tain has the fairness of an elephant's freshly-cut tooth. On your going to its slopes, the mountain's beauty will be worth seeing, with half-closed, contented eyes. It will be like that of Halabhrit (Balaram, the bearer of the plough) with the green-black raiment placed over his shoulder. (Balaram is big-bodied and fair and is fond of dark clothes.)

63. That mountain is a sports-field for Shiva and his consort Gauri. You may find Gauri strolling there, and Shambhu (Shiva) taking off the snakes coiled around his wrists like bangles, to offer her his arm. In that case, go in front of her, compose your body into an arrangement of divisions, and condense the water inside. Form yourself into a flight of stairs to the bejeweled platform on top of the mountain. (Kailasa is supposed to be made of jewels and crystals and so called Manimahesh.)

64. The young goddesses there are bound to strike you with the hard points of their bangles, make you spew out water, and so convert you into a shower-room.. Friend! If you cannot get free of those frolicsome ladies in that hot summer, scare them with a roar that is harsh on the ear.

65. O Cloud, giver of water! Take in the water that produces golden lotuses from the lake Manasa. Provide a moment's pleasure for Airavata (Indra's mythical elephant) by acting as a cover for his face. Wave the new leaves of the Kalpadruma like fine cloth in the wind. (The Kalpadruma is a mythical tree with fruits satisfying all kinds of desire.) In various delicate ways, enjoy that lordly mountain as you wish.

66. On Kailasa, as on a lover's lap, lies Alaka, her fine white clothes – the foamy waters of Ganga – disarrayed. It has soaring structures and hence bears in your season – the monsoon – the disgorging of water like a woman with her hair in a net of pearls. O you who can move at will! Once you see it, you cannot fail to recognize it.

Uttaramegha

The *Uttaramegha* has 55 verses. It is entirely in the form of the Yaksha's speech. The Yaksha begins with a description of the city of Alaka, where his wife is pining away for him. While the descriptions so far are of actual places that exist even today, the following is a description of a mythical or imaginary place.

Alaka is a place where:

1. The mansions can compare with you in every aspect. You have lightning flashes, they have graceful ladies. You have the rainbow, they contain paintings. You have the cool, grave sound of thunder, they have the beats of the drum. You have water inside, they have bejeweled floors. You tower into the sky, they too are so tall as to seem to be licking the sky.

2. Young wives sport lotuses in their hands, they have buds of the small, white, fragrant *kunda* flowers studded in their hair-nets. They bring a beautiful pallor into their faces with the pollen-dust of *lodhra* flowers. They put fresh *kurabaka* flowers alongside their piled-up tresses, and delicate *sirisha* blossoms in their ears. At the centre parting of their hair, they put the *nipa* (*kadamba*) that flowers upon your arrival. (The implication is that on earth, these plants flower in different seasons, but in Alaka, can be found all the year round.)

3. The trees are constantly in flower and so, resounding with intoxicated bees. The beds of lotuses are constantly in flower and girdled with rows of swans. The pet peacocks of the mansions constantly display their bright fans of feathers and raise their necks in shrieks. The nights are always pleasantly clear and moonlit.

4. Any tears from the eyes of wealthy nobles there (i.e., the Yakshas) are born of no other reason than joy. There is no distress other than that born of the one with an arrow of flowers (Madana, the god of love, like Cupid), which is cured upon contact with the desired one. No separation occurs there for reasons other than lovers' tiffs, nor is there any age other than youth.

5. The grounds adjoining the mansions are paved with *sitamani*, crystals that look like flowers made out of the reflection of starlight. With huge drums being gently beaten and rumbling gravely like you, the Yakshas, accompanied by great beauties, go there and taste Ratiphala, a drink that excites the desire for lovemaking and is generated from Kalpavriksha, the tree that fulfils all desires.

6. Maidens, whom even the gods consider desirable, are at play, served by breezes cooled by the river Mandakini, and shaded from the heat by the Mandara trees on the banks. They sport with jewels, holding them secretly in clenched fists and then thrusting them into the sands of gold, to be searched out.

7. When the girdle-knots of women with lips like the Bimba fruit get untied, their expensive silk garments flow out. With quick fingers, their ardent lovers begin to throw them off entirely. The women are dazed by a sense of modesty. Then inspiration comes to them – they must put out the lamps by flinging handfuls of powder at them! (Saffron or sandalwood dust may be lying nearby for cosmetic purposes.) But the idea fails even when the powder they fling reaches the high flames, as the lamps are made out of jewels.

8. Clouds like you, propelled by the ever-blowing wind to the terraces in front of lofty mansions, produce defects in their frescoes/paintings with their drops. Immediately, as though struck by fear, they get fragmented and fall out by way of the lattices, expertly imitating the emission of smoke.

9. From the threads of the networks canopying the beds, hang pendants of Chandrakanta (moonstones). At midnight, when you move away from the moon, free from your constraint, its rays make the moonstones emit drops of water. Those water particles

remove the fatigue of love-sports from women released from the embraces of lovers. (It was old belief that when moonlight acts upon it, the moonstone absorbs the light and then discharges it in the form of cool drops of water.)

10. With endless wealth inside their houses, the amorous Yakshas enjoy themselves every day by roaming in the outer garden named Vaibhraja. They chat and mix with ethereal beauties and with important courtesans, while the Kinnaras, music-loving celestial creatures, sing loud praises of Dhanapati (Kubera) in melodious voices.

11. Upon sunrise, the routes taken at night by women following their desire are indicated by Mandara blossoms fallen from the hair, the torn petals of golden lotuses detached from the ear, and broken strings of pearl-weave necklaces torn by breasts that had expanded due to swift movements heaving the body.

12. The Kalpavriksha – the tree of desire – singly yields all kinds of accessories for women – ornaments, patterned clothes, wine skilled in commanding graceful movements of the eyes, flowers with new leaves that can be alternatives to ornaments, and the lac-red dye suitable for feet like lotuses.

13. The place has leaf-green horses that can challenge the horses of Dinakara, the Sun-god. It has elephants lofty as hills which, because of the fat they exude, are as full of water as the cloud that you are. It also has prominent war-heroes who have withstood Dashamukha (Ravana) in battle and discarded ornaments due to sores marked upon them by Chandrahasa (the shining sword of Ravana, the invader of Alaka).

14. Manmatha (the god of love), who has a bow with a row of bees for its string, generally does not carry it in Alaka. This is out of fear, because Shiva, the friend of Dhanapati (Kubera), is present in person there. (Shiva had burnt Manmatha to cinders with his glance.) His tasks are accomplished by the gestures of love-play that artful women make, arching their eyebrows, an act that never fails with amorous ones.

15. Such is Alaka and it is there that 'our' home is. (Now, from a general description of Alaka, the Yaksha goes into the description of his house in particular.) It is to the north of the abode of Dhanapati (Kubera), and is recognizable from a distance by its archway, pretty as Surapati's (Indra's) bow – the rainbow, by the side of which, there is a young Mandara tree bent with bunches of flowers that can be reached by the hand, and reared by my wife like a son.

16. A pool too is inside it, with stairs of *marakata* (emerald) going down into it. It is filled with full-blown *haima* (golden) lotuses, with stems of glistening *vaidurjya* (lapis lazuli). Ducks, having settled down in its waters, are freed of their worries, and even on seeing you, the cloud, do not hanker for the lake Manasa, although it is close by.

17. On its bank, there is a pleasure-hill whose peak is constructed with gleaming *indranila-mani* (sapphires). It is ringed by *kanaka-kadali* (golden plantains) which make it a sight worth seeing. O Friend! On seeing you, with lightning flashing at your edges, I am reminded of that rock. My mind hurts because of your resemblance to that rock, which is a favourite of my wife's.

18. On it, near a bower of the creeper Madhavi (with pink-and-white blossoms) bordered with Kuravaka, stand a red-blossomed Ashoka tree with waving new leaves and a pretty (white-blossomed) Kesara (Bakula) tree. One desires – along with me – a kick from the left foot of your friend (my wife). The other desires, on the pretext of having dohada longings, a sprinkle of wine from her mouth. (Dohada literally means the longings of a pregnant woman and here refers to rituals associated with the flowering of plants that are supposed to have similar longings. The Ashoka used to be given a kick by a young lady, the Bakula sprinkled with mouthfuls of liquor.)

19. And between these two trees, there is a golden rod on a crystal-slab, its base studded with gems and glowing like young bamboo. There, at the end of the day, rests the blue-necked peacock, a friend of your kind (i.e., clouds). My wife makes it dance to the clap of her hands, pleasantly resounding with bangles.

20.O skilled one! Identify my residence from these signs stored deep in your heart, and from the painted figures of the conch-shell and the lotus at the door-edge. It is bound to be dim in appearance now – because of my absence. The sun having set, the lotus does indeed not retain its own.

21.Quickly assume the small form of a baby elephant so that you can have a quick descent. Be seated on the pleasant-slopes of the pleasure-hill mentioned earlier. It will befit you to cast into the interior of the residence glances, like lightning just beginning to flash – little by little – like a row of fire-flies gleaming.

Now begins a description of the woman who is within the house at Alaka.

22.The one who is there is slim and youthful, has pointed teeth and lower lip like the ripe fruit of Bimba. She is slender at the waist, has eyes like those of a startled deer, and a navel that is deep. She has a languorous walk because of her heavy hips, and stoops a little on account of her bosoms. She is like the Creator's primal creation in the area of young women.

23.She is reserved in speech, and lonely as the female Chakravaka with me, her companion, gone. (The Chakravaka geese move in pairs, but are believed condemned to separation at night for laughing at Rama bereft of Sita.) Know her to be my second life. That deeply suffering girl passing through days heavy (with sorrow), has, I think, become changed in appearance, like the lotus blighted by winter cold.

24.My darling's face will be on her hand (in a standard gesture of separation). Her eyes will be swollen due to tempestuous weeping. Her lower lip will be discoloured due to hot breath and only partially visible because of hair hanging down (i.e., un-cared for, as the hair of separated women were supposed to be). Thus her face will contain the misery of the moon worn-out by you – the cloud – pursuing it.

25.She will soon come into your sight, and she will be either preoccupied in making offerings (to the deities, for getting her husband

back), or drawing my likeness as she sees it in her imagination – emaciated by separation. Or, she will be asking this of the sweet-spoken Sarika in the cage: "Sweet one! Do you ever remember the master? It is you who was his darling!" (Sarika is the female parrot or mynah, traditionally possessing wisdom and speech.)

26. O Cloud, the calm and pleasant one! Alternatively, (you will find her) flinging the *veena* (lute) on her shabbily covered lap. Her desire is to sing songs made out of words indicative of my family name. The strings will be wet with her tears, and she will be tuning them somehow. But then she will forget again and again the melodies, even though she composed them herself.

27. Or (you will find her) in the middle of counting the months remaining out of the limit set on the day of separation. This she will be doing by arranging the flowers placed on the threshold (for the purpose of indicating the limit). (You may also find her) tasting the pleasurable acts treasured in her heart. These are usually the diversions of women in a state of separation from their lovers.

28. There being work to do, separation will not hurt your friend that much during the day. But I am afraid that she will be suffering more in the night, being without any recreation then. (So) at midnight, positioned at the window of the mansion, observe that faithful wife, who will be getting up from her sleep on the ground, and who can be completely cheered up by the message from me.

29. You will see her wasted away by mental illness, lying on one side of the bed of separation, like the slim body of the moon at the base of the east – only one left out of its (sixteen) parts. (Traditionally, *virahashayana* or the bed of separation is rough and made out of leaves, while *milanashayana*, the bed of union, is a soft pleasure-bed.) With me in love-play as per her wishes, the nights had gone as though in a moment. She is spending those same nights in hot tears and the nights are longer because of the separation.

30. Out of her previous experience of pleasure, she turns her eyes towards the cool nectar of moonbeams entering through the lattice. She immediately withdraws them and covers them with lashes

heavy with tears of sorrow. She looks like the Sthalakamala flower on a cloudy day, neither sleeping nor fully awake. (The Sthalakamala or land-lotus grows on a small tree, unfurling and deepening in colour as the day passes, i.e., in response to sunlight.)

31. Roughened by bathing simply (with only water, no oil or perfume), her hair will be hanging down her cheeks, and she will be blowing it away with sighs that wear out the fresh leaves that her lips resemble. She will be thinking of pleasuring with me somehow - even in dreams. And so, she will desire sleep, even though scope for it is barred by the gush of tears.

32. Every now and then her hand, with its untrimmed nails, will be removing her hair from her broad cheeks. The hair will be in a single braid, stiff and rough and unpleasant to touch. It has been braided on the very first day of separation, after discarding the garland around it, and it is to be unbraided by me, with the dissolution of my sorrow at the ending of the curse. (Women separated from their husbands were not supposed to arrange their hair or otherwise take care of their appearances till their husbands were back.)

33. Again and again, the delicate creature will be casting off all the ornaments from her frail body and resting it painfully on the lap of the bed. She will certainly make you too shed tears of fresh water. For, almost all charitable people have hearts melting with sympathy.

34. I know your friend's (i.e., the wife's) mind to be full of affection for me, and that is why I infer her to have become like this in this first separation of ours. I am not making overstatements from a feeling of being a lucky fellow. For, O cloud, my brother, you will soon be actually seeing all that I have mentioned.

35. She is a doe-eyed creature. But hair blocks the movements of the pupils to the corners of the eyes, which are without the softness of collyrium, and, which, because of her withdrawal from wine, have forgotten how to sport with eyebrows. At you approach, her eye will pulsate at the top and reach comparability in loveliness with lotus being moved by the agitation of fishes. (Tradi-

tionally, it is considered to augur someone's arrival if a woman's left eyelid throbs.)

36. Also throbbing will be her left thigh – fair like the column of juicy Kadali (plantain), now free of my nail-marks, its long-familiar string of pearls discarded at the turn of fortune, and used to being massaged by my hands at the culmination of enjoyment. (It was believed that the tremor of the left thigh was indicative of the approach of the lover.)

37. O Cloud, giver of water! If at that time she has got the happiness of sleep, bear only a *yama* (a measure of night-time, 3 hours), sitting behind her, desisting from thunder. If somehow in her dreams she has found me as a lover, do not let her arms – which are like creepers – immediately get detached from the bond of her close embrace.

38. Awakening her then by breeze cooled by particles of your own water, reassure her like young buds of Malati (a creeper with pink-and-white blossoms). Slowly, with the lightning restrained within, begin to speak in words of muted thunder to the proud lady who has got her eyes fixed upon the window you are at.

Now begins the actual message the Yaksha has for his wife

39. "O you who are not a widow (yet)! Know me to be a bearer of water and a dear friend of your husband's. I come to you bearing his message within my heart. When groups of travelers living away from their homes and keen to unravel the plaits of their women, get tired along their way, I am the one who expedites them by making deep and soothing sounds."

40. With your having made such a statement, she will look at you like Maithili (Sita) at Pavananandana (Hanuman), neck raised, heart swelling. She will welcome you, and now that she is aware of you, she will attentively listen to what follows. O Calm and pleasant one! For wives, getting the news of their husbands brought by friends is only a little short of getting united with them.

53. Thus reassuring your friend (the Yakshi) who is acutely suffering from the first experience of separation, quickly return from the mountain whose peaks have been dug out by the bull of Trinayana (Shiva). With her words of welfare sent along with some signs of recognition, support my life as well, which is hanging as loose as a Kunda blossom about to fall off in the morning. (The Kunda blossoms in the night and falls off at dawn.)

54. O Calm and pleasant one! Do you agree to undertake this friendly task? Indeed, I do not gauge your steadiness of purpose from a reply. When begged by the Chataka birds, even if silent, you grant them water. To those who make requests to them, the good reply by way of accomplishing their desired purpose.

55. O Cloud, giver of water! I am making an unjustified request. Do me this favour, moved by feelings of friendliness or of compassion. Then with your glory heightened by the monsoon, roam about in countries of your desire. May you never have even a moment's separation from the lightning.

So ends *Uttaramegha* of the *kavya Meghadootam*.

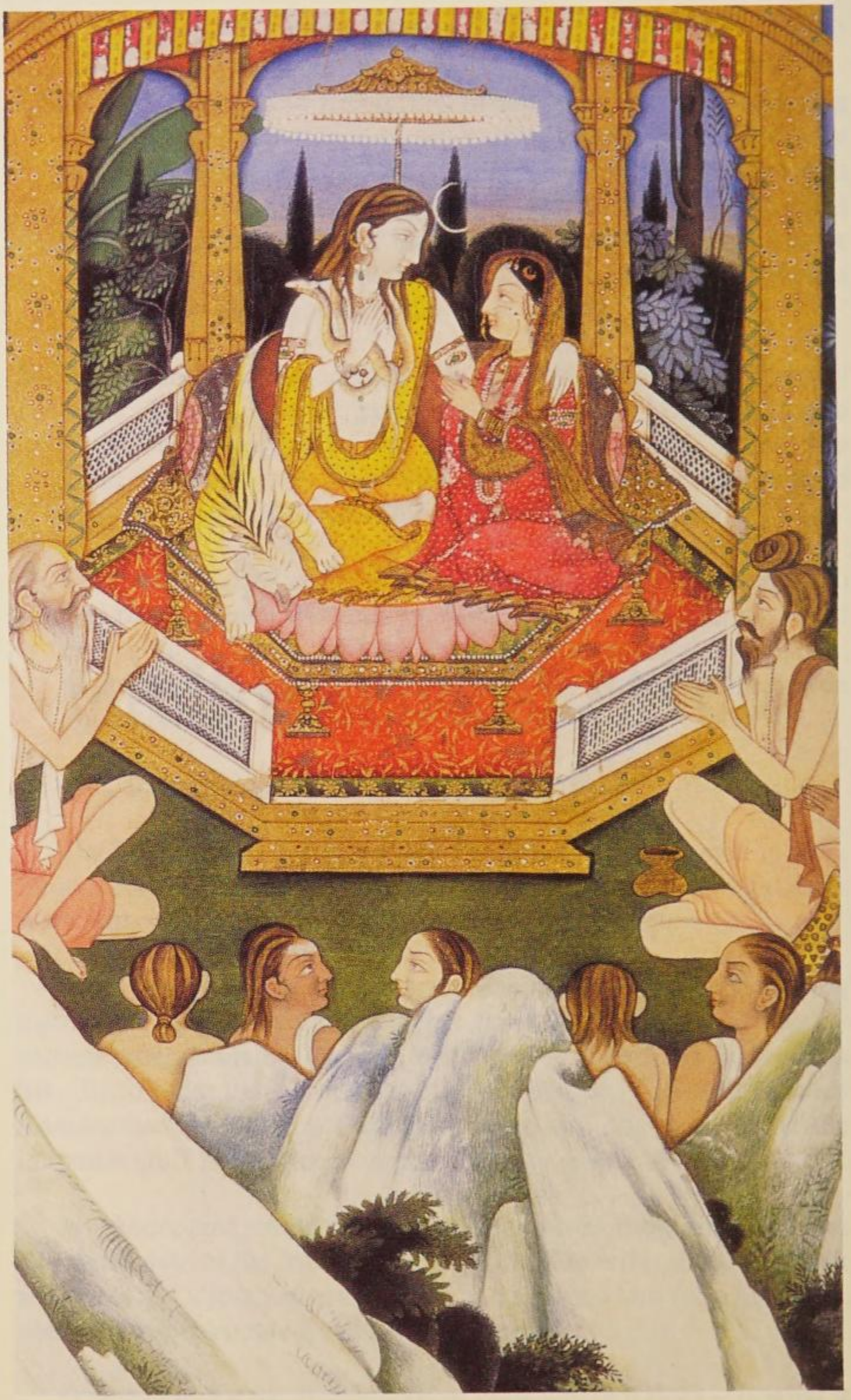
The Yaksha does not go on and on. Kalidasa knew when to stop. He made no attempt to give an 'ending', happy or sad, to the Yaksha's story, although a later poet did attempt a poor sequel.

It has been Kalidasa's lot to have several lesser poets try to pass their work as his. So great was his fame that aspirants to literary success often imitated his style and inserted their lines in between his. Entire cantos have been added like this in the case of *Kumarasambhavam*. But Kalidasa's work was so superior that the imitation stuff is easy to recognize and reject.

Meghadootam would be spoilt if we got to know that, yes, the cloud did deliver the Yakshas's message to his wife, and came back with a reply. Or that Kubera relented and released him from the curse, and the Yaksha-couple lived happily ever after.

Fortunately for us, *Meghadootam* ends where it does – is what it is – pure romance, pure poetry, the yearning of one so lonely that he would have even a cloud in the sky as his messenger!

KUMARASAMBHAVAM



Homage to Shiva and Parvati

Introducing Kumarasambhavam

Kumarasambhavam has eight cantos and 613 verses.

Canto I opens with a fine description of Himalaya who is personified as the 'king of mountains'. He has a wife, son and daughter, Mena, Mainaka and Parvati, respectively. Parvati in her former birth was Sati, the daughter of Daksha and wife of Shiva, who died because she could not bear her father denigrating Shiva. Now, she is a budding beauty whom the great sage Narada has predicted to be Shiva's future wife. Shiva however, after the loss of his wife Sati, has lost all interest in love, romance or physical pleasure, and is deep in meditation on one of the peaks of the Himalayas. Himalaya encourages Parvati to take two of her companions, one of them named Vijaya, and wait upon Shiva as he sat meditating. At the end of the canto, we find Shiva accepting her services, but without his passions being stirred.

Canto II states that around this time, a villainous demon named Taraka was creating panic among the *sura*s or gods. The gods approached Brahma in a body and were told that only a son born of Shiva and Parvati could help them out by becoming their army-chief and leading them to victory over Taraka. The gods decided that they would use Madana, the god of love, to bring Shiva and Parvati together.

Canto III begins with Indra, the king of gods, assigning Madana his task. Accompanied by his wife Rati and associate Vasanta, Madana confidently goes where Shiva sits meditating. Sudden spring

descends upon the area and is described poetically. Parvati arrives and Madana is about to shoot his flowery arrow at Shiva and smite him with passion. But a shade disturbed already by Parvati's arrival in the middle of that spring atmosphere, Shiva looks around and catches sight of Madana. He gets so angry that fire flashes out of the 'third eye' he had on his forehead. Madana is reduced to ashes – not exactly dead, but formless, invisible. A humiliated Parvati is taken home by her father.

Canto IV is a heart-rending lament for Madana by Rati, who at its end, is persuaded not to immolate herself in order to be united with her husband and lover. The heavens declare that when Shiva marries Parvati, Madana will get his body back.

Canto V is the most eventful one. Parvati is shaken by her rejection and realises the futility of mere physical attraction. As she has always wanted Shiva for her husband, she determines to practice austere penance to reach her target. She persuades her mother to allow her to go to a remote peak of the Himalayas and there mortifies her flesh in the most severe way. Meditating in icy water as well as under the blazing sun, going without food and drink, she eventually manages to make an impression on Shiva. He comes to her in the disguise of a hermit and tests her loyalty by belittling Shiva in front of her. However polite she is to her guest in the beginning, Parvati soon gets irritated and angry. (As in her former birth as Sati, she cannot bear to listen to Shiva being denigrated.) After teasing the young girl in this fashion, the great godhead Shiva then reveals himself. As he says that Parvati's austerities have made him her slave, Parvati is overwhelmed.

In Canto VI, Shiva entrusts the seven great sages to approach Himalaya for the formal sanction of his marriage with Parvati. The sages go to the capital city of Himalaya's kingdom, get Himalaya's ready consent, and fix the date of the marriage.

Canto VII contains delightful descriptions of how Himalaya's capital got ready to receive Shiva as a bridegroom, how Parvati as well as Shiva were readied for the wedding ceremony, and how the ceremony itself went.

Canto VIII begins by showing how shy Parvati was as a bride. Even after guests had dispersed, Shiva stayed on at Himalaya's palace for a month, in course of which, Parvati slowly shed some of her shyness. Then the newly wedded couple wandered across mountain regions, coming finally to the Gandhamadana hills. There Parvati shed all her inhibitions and Shiva had such a delightful first night that he stayed on there for the next twenty-five years.

Kalidasa's *Kumarasambhavam* had ended with this statement, say the scholars. There are nine other cantos available, but they are believed to have been inserted by later-day imitators of Kalidasa. They repeat details already there in the Puranas, about how Kumara actually came to be born and reared and led the gods to vanquish their tormentor Tarakasura.

Kumarasambhavam as an epic

Kumarasambhavam is regarded as an epic poem or *mahakavya*, rather than lyric poem or *khandakavya*.

By Sanskrit literary norms, a *mahakavya* should be divided into chapters called *sarga*s or cantos not less than eight in number and neither too long nor too short. Each canto should be written in the same *chhandas* (metre), which should change only at the end; for variety, sometimes a *sarga* can be written in more than one metre. The contents of the next canto should be indicated at the end of the present one.

The hero should have the qualities of a 'dheerodatta', *i.e.*, be either a divine personage or a *kshatriya* of noble and pure descent; if there are several heroes, they should all have those qualities and belong to the same family.

The prominent *rasa* (flavour) should be either of *shringara*, *veera* or *shanta*, the others being only accessories. But the *rasa* can vary from *sarga* to *sarga*. The subject matter should be systematically arranged. The plot may be historical or describe the feats of heroes.

It should aim at the four human objectives of *dharma*, *artha*, *kama* and *moksha* and be written in a manner that shows how those objectives can be attained.

It should open with a salutation to the deities, or a blessing to the readers, or a hint about the subject matter, followed by the praise of heroes and censure of villains.

It should have descriptions of subjects like sunrise, twilight, night, seasons, mountains, forests oceans, cities, the heaven, and incidents like hunting, invasion, battles, coronation, sacrificial ceremony, union and separation of lovers, and birth of a son.

It should be named after the poet, or the theme, or the hero or some other prominent person, while each canto should be named according to its content.

In contrast, *khandakavya* (literally, a fragment of literature) is *kavyasaya ekadeshanusary*, that is, follows the norms of literature in a one-sided way.

Kumarasambhavam does follow the broad requirements of a *mahakavya*. It is divided into (at least) eight cantos. It has a most exalted character – Shiva – as its hero. It has a daring objective – the attainment of *kama* or physical desire by a great godhead. It opens with a praise of the heroine Parvati's father, who is a divinity himself. Each canto has a specific metre. There is one predominant flavour (*shringara*). The others are accessories such as *karuna* in Canto IV. There are memorable descriptions of spring, and sunset. Its title indicates the theme – the birth of Kumara – and each canto is separately named (like Canto I as Uma's Beginnings, Canto II as Meeting Brahma).

Canto I

Umotpatti - Uma's Beginnings

There exists in the north a mountain named Himalaya, the abode of snow. It is the king among mountains and a divinity at the core. Reaching up to the oceans in the east and the west, it stands like the measuring-rod of Prithvi, the earth.

Himalaya abounds in jewels and minerals. It also abounds in snow, but that does not detract from Himalaya's merits. A single fault among many virtues sinks without a trace, like a single spot on the moon is lost among moonbeams.

Himalaya is home to the hunting tribe of Kiratas, and mythical creatures like the wise Siddhas, beautiful Apsaras, talented Vidyadharas, and musical Kinnaras, Kimpurushas, and Ashvamukhas.

Along the mountain-paths, Kiratas track lions which have killed elephants. Apsaras revel in the untimely twilight that the rich colour of metals on Himalaya's peaks, spreading through clouds, create. Siddhas enjoy its shady slopes and sunny peaks. Young Vidyadhara girls use the bark of its Bhurja (birch) trees which are marked in mineral fluids. Kinnaras sing to the accompaniment of breeze from cave-mouths, blowing through bamboo clumps. Kimpurushas dwell in its caverns, whose entrances are overhung with clouds. Heavy-set Ashvamukhi women walk slowly along its frozen paths, although the frost hurts their feet.

Sarala and Devadaru (species of pine) trees grow on its slopes. Elephants rub against Sarala trees to get rid of the itching on their cheeks, and scent Himalaya with the thick white sap that results.

The breeze from Himalaya carries with it spray from the Bhagirathi (Ganga) river, making Devadaru trees tremble and peacocks' tails quiver. The Kiratas, tired after hunting deer, get soothed by the pleasant breeze.

The caves of Himalaya are the resort of darkness, which is like an owl frightened of the day. But *oshadhi* (phosphorescent medicinal herbs) grows in the caves and gleam like lamps at night.

Lotuses bloom in lakes located on high Himalayan peaks. Saptarishi, the seven great sages pick them with their own hands.

Himalaya is heavy of foot, because of the substances he has inside. The Devadaru trees are Himalaya's arms, the rocks his chest, and the caves his mineral-red mouth which sound every word twice, like echoes.

Brahma, the Creator, himself conferred on Himalaya the right to reign over all mountains and get a share of offerings at sacrifices. The *chamari* (yak) cattle, when they wave their white tails, seem to wave *chamaras* (whisks made from wool of yaks) to this Giriraja or Nagadhiraja ('king' of mountains).

Himalaya wanted his family-line to continue. Observing due rites, he married Mena, whose birth had been conceived of by the Pitris, who were his equal, and whom even the sages held in esteem. (The Pitris were deceased ancestors who had special powers and a world of their own.) They began to enjoy their conjugal life and in course of time, Himalaya's young wife conceived a child. Mainaka was born. He wedded a daughter of the Nagas (snakes, or a tribe worshipping snakes) and made a friend of the ocean, in whose waters he hid himself from Indra's thunderbolt.

Then Mena was approached by Sati. Sati was the daughter of Daksha who had married Shiva but, by the powers of yoga, had given up her body when her father had insulted her husband.

Himalaya generated her within his quiet, self-restrained wife, like prosperity generated by energies directed properly. Her birthday was a clear, happy day for all, when conch-shells rang out and flowers

showered down. The mother looked even prettier because of her daughter's halo of light – just like the Vidura hill containing Vaidurya (sapphires/lapis lazuli) looks when thunder splits open its sides and makes the glow of jewels emanate (because the baby was of divine origin, she was born with a halo).

Growing day by day, she developed *kala*s (accomplishments) like the thin new moon develops its *kala*s (parts).

Friends called that pretty, friendly girl Parvati by reason of her father being a parvat or mountain. Only later would she be called Uma ('U-ma' or 'Oh don't' was what her mother would say to stop her from the rigorous penance she would practice).

Himalaya had a son. Yet his eyes never tired of looking at this child of his. The spring has an infinite number of flowers, but bees are more attached to mango-blossoms. She gave him a greater glory and sanctity, like the bright flames give the lamp, the river Ganga to the heavenly path, and refined speech to the wise. In her childhood, she often enjoyed herself with balls, and mud-banks on the Ganga. Her past life had made permanent impressions on her. At the time of lessons, whatever she had learnt in her past life came back to her as swans to the river Ganga in autumn, and luminescence to herbs at night.

Now she reached a stage beyond childhood, which was a natural ornament of her slim body, an intoxicant other than wine, a missile of love-god Madana's, other than flowers.

Her youthful body was symmetrical in every respect, like a lotus split open by sunrays.

Her toes were pink and her steps had the changing beauty of the Sthalaravinda (the land-lotus whose flowers change from white to deep pink as the day progresses).

Stooping because of her heavy breasts, jingling her anklets, she walked gracefully, as though she had been taught by swans.

Though rounded and plump, elephant trunks were too rough, and plantain-stalks too cold, to compare with her rounded thighs.

She had a deep navel, with newly-grown, fine hair emanating from it like rays from the gem at the centre of her girdle.

She had a slender waist with three delicate folds; it was like an altar with stairs that her burgeoning youth had raised for love-god Madana to ascend.

She had pale breasts with dark-centres, breasts that were so well developed that they pressed against each other, with no room in between for even a fibre from a lotus-stem.

Her arms were more delicate than *sirisha* blossoms.

Her neck was flattened at the base on account of her elevated breasts, stopping the pearl-necklace round it from slipping down to the bosom. The neck and the necklace set each other off and the beautifier was indistinguishable from the beautified.

As for the face, it provided Lakshmi, the goddess of beauty, the twofold pleasure of the moon in the company of the lotus (which unfurls its petals only during the day).

The smile that spread on her copper-colored lips could be imitated only if a (white) flower was placed on a new (reddish) leaf or a pearl on a spotless coral.

Her voice was sweet as nectar. It made even the cuckoo sound like a musical instrument that is out of tune.

Her eyes were large and elongated. Their quick, startled glance resembled the blue lotus trembling in a strong wind. Did she get it from female fawns, or did they get it from her?

Her brows seemed to be etched by *anjana-shalaka* (collyrium-sticks). Their arches put the bow of the love-god to shame. Her hair was more luxuriant than the hair of the *chamari* (yak).

In short, the Creator – out of desire to see every kind of beauty combined in one form, had created her with great care, getting every standard of beauty correctly placed.

Even when Parvati reached adolescence, her father remained indifferent to finding out a bridegroom for her. The great sage Narada had told him that she was to become the one and only wife of Shiva – through a process of love. Himalaya knew that, but he could not offer his daughter to Shiva unsolicited.

Meanwhile, with all his attachment to worldly pleasures gone with Sati, Shiva went on living without a wife. For clothes, he wore a skin. He stayed on the snowy peaks, practicing yoga. The *ganas*, his attendants, wore barks, decked themselves with mineral dyes and flowers, and sat among rocks fragrant with resin. The humped bull he rode stood there, digging up the hardened snow with his hooves. He bellowed at lions, while other cattle looked on in awe. Shiva lit a fire with wood meant for sacrificial fire and practiced rigorous meditation.

Himalaya paid him his respects and commanded his daughter to serve him, taking two of her friends with her. Even though she was a distraction to his meditation, Shiva accepted her as she went about performing her services.

Parvati brought flowers for his offerings, *kusha* grass and water for rites, and kept the altar clean. Regularly she attended upon him, and felt her own fatigue to be soothed by the crescent moon on Shiva's head.

Canto II

Brahmasakshatkara - Meeting Brahma

At that time, the *sura*s – super-humans or gods – were being troubled by the *asura* Taraka. (The *asura*s were a rival group of super-humans, contending with the *suras* or gods for power.) With Indra at their head, the *suras* went to the abode of Brahma.

He came upon the crestfallen lot as the morning sun comes upon a lake of lotus-buds.

"You alone are the cause of the entire creation", the gods sung his praise.

Duly praised and propitiated, Brahma asked them what their problem was.

"Why is it that your faces are like stars with their glow dimmed by mist? Indra's thunderbolt seems blunted. Varuna's noose is limp like a snake under a spell. Kubera's arm, without its weapon, the mace, seems like a tree with its branches broken off. Yama's powerful rod is lacklustre and Yama is scratching the ground with it. The Adityas are cold, the Maruts are still, and the Rudras silent. Have you – the established ones – been thrown out of power by some new enemy, like general rules are sometimes cast aside on account of exceptions?"

Urged by Indra, Brihaspati, the preceptor of the gods, spoke to Brahma with folded palms:

"We have been thrown out of power. Empowered by a boon from you, the mighty *asura* Taraka has grown daring and risen like a comet to torment the world. It is him that the gods now serve. The sun sends him only that much ray as is needed for the lotuses in his lake. The moon keeps all her *kala* (parts) for his service, except for the one part kept for Shiva. The wind, afraid of being accused of blowing away the flowers in his garden, blows over him as gently as a fan. The seasons have become his gardeners. The sea is anxious to produce gems for him. The serpents, under the leadership of Vasuki, provide him light at night with the glow of their jewels. Even Indra sends him flowers of Kalpadruma trees (mythical trees of heaven that provide fruits of all desire). Even when served like this, he goes on troubling the three worlds. For, a wicked man is checked only by harm done to him in retaliation, not by good deeds done towards him.

He fells trees of the garden of heaven, the leaves of which were plucked only very tenderly by wives of the gods. He holds celestial women captive, who fan him with their hot sighs and spray him with their tears. He has uprooted the mountain Meru and built pleasure-hills at his residence. He has made golden lotuses desert the Ganga and bloom in his pleasure-pools. He has robbed Indra of his horse Uccchaishrava. His elephants have defeated Indra's elephant Airavata. All our strategies against him have failed, like potent medicine failing to act against serious disease. Even Vishnu's bladed discus, its glow dulled, has become an ornament round his neck. So we need a general or army-chief who will give our soldiers protection. Placing him at the front, Indra will go to fight and win."

Brahma replied in words sweeter than showers after rain.

"What you want will be granted. Wait for some time. But I will not grant it myself. Taraka had got his powers from me. It is not proper to fell by yourself a tree you have nurtured, even if it is a poison-tree.

But who else can withstand Taraka other than Shiva? He is the supreme one, the brightness beyond darkness, one whom even Vishnu and I cannot fully comprehend. Only portions of Shiva's energies, that is, a son born of him, can help you achieve your purpose. You

should try to distract his attention to meditation with the magnet of Parvati's beauty. She alone has the capacity to bear the seeds Shiva deposits. On becoming the chief of your soldiers, he – who is Shiva's own – will get victory for you. He will untie the braids of the captive ladies of the *suras*." (It was a custom for women who were captive or separated from their husbands to tie their hair in one plait and not do their hair before circumstances changed.)

Brahma vanished. Clear in their minds about their future course of action, the gods too went back to their celestial world.

Indra decided that Madana (also named Kamdarpa, Kamadeva, Makaradhdhaja, Samkalpa-Yoni, Smara, Manobhava, Ananga and Atanu), the deity of love, was the right one to do the job, and quickly gave him a call. Madana came up with folded palms. His neck bore the marks of his consort Rati's bangles. Over it was slung his bow, its ends arched like eyebrows of beautiful women. His missiles were mango-sprouts and his friend Vasanta, the season of spring, carried them for him.

Canto III

Madanadahana - Burning of Madana

Indra had a thousand eyes. Although there were many other deities present, they fell simultaneously upon Madana as he entered the court. "Sit down", said Indra, indicating a seat next to him. Madana, head bowed in acknowledgement, began to speak secretively: "Command me as to what is to be done! Who has been practicing long austerities in order to usurp your throne? I will straighten him out with this bow of mine.

Who, without sanction from you, has been meditating to free himself of the bondage of birth and death? I will pin him down forever with the dart of women's glances.

Which chaste woman has caught your fancy? She will come to you on her own, seeking your embrace.

Let your weapon, the thunderbolt, take some rest. Which enemy of the gods should be rendered so weak as to cower even before pouting women?

By your favour, with only Vasanta as my help, I can make Shiva himself lose his concentration. Is there any archer to vie with me?"

Indra sat more relaxed. He spoke on:

"All this, you can do. The bolt and you – you are my two weapons. Out of these, the bolt is not very effective among those who are empowered by rigorous meditation. But you can go everywhere and get your results.

Because I know what you are capable of, and feel you to be close to me, I entrust you with a serious charge.

You have almost undertaken to do our job by saying that you can strike Shiva with your arrow. Know this to be the objective of the gods now."

Explaining how the gods had been advised by Brahma, Indra went on:

"You alone can strike at Shiva when he is deep in his meditative state. Try to make Parvati palatable to him. None but she can bear the force of Shiva's energies; Brahma made this clear to us. As I have heard from the lips of Apsaras – my secret agents, Parvati is there on the mountain, serving Shiva. So go there to achieve the objective; do the work assigned to you by gods. Yours will be the good fortune to strike Shiva. An extraordinary feat contributes to fame. The gods are looking towards you to perform this act. It is also an act that will benefit the three worlds. Your prowess is enviable. Like the wind fans the fire unasked, Vasanta is there to assist you, even without actually being asked to do so."

"As you say", said Madana, bowing to accept Indra's command, like a garland sanctified by being offered in worship. With hand roughened by stroking his elephant Airavata, Indra touched his head. Madana departed.

Determined to succeed, even at the cost of life and limb, he left for Shiva's hermitage on the Himalayas. Friend Vasanta and wife Rati followed apprehensively.

Spring, the pride of the god of love, and the adversary of sages in meditation, manifested its own form in that hermitage of Shiva's.

Transgressing time, the warm rays of the Sun began to proceed north, a direction guarded by Kubera. From the southern corner, Wind, the carrier of fragrance, shed a sigh of pain.

Chuta (mango)-blossoms are Madana's arrows, plumed as though with sprouting leaves. As soon as they blossomed, Spring set bees

upon them as if to inscribe names of Madana. (Arrow-plumes have names of owners inscribed upon them.)

Karnikara-blossoms made the scene bright and colourful, although they pained the mind because they had no fragrance.

The bright-red *palasha* flowers, not fully unfurled and curved like the crescent moon, looked like fresh nail-scratches the forest women received (from their lovers) at the untimely approach of Spring.

Vasanta-shree, the presiding goddess of spring, drew devotional patterns on her face with the collyrium-black of bees sitting on *tilaka* flowers. She reddened the mango-sprouts that were her lips with the soft red of the morning sun.

The forest-glades were filled with the rustle of trees shedding their leaves. The pollen-dust from the sprigs of *piyala* trees hampered the vision of the deer which, emboldened by intoxication, ran against the wind in those glades.

To prevent their faces and lips from cracking in the winter cold, Kimpurusha women used to anoint their faces and lips with red pigment, honey and wax applied in decorative, leafy patterns. With the disappearance of winter, the decorations began to perspire. The red began to smudge and run down. Their faces began to look bare and lips pale.

The sages in that hermitage had difficulty in keeping their minds under control at the untimely approach of Spring.

As Madana, accompanied by Rati, arrived at that place, pairs of every species became charged with extreme affection. The bee-couple took their drink from the same cup, that is, flower, the male bee taking his sip only after his darling had taken hers. As for the *krishnasara* deer, the male scratched the back of his mate, making her drowsy with pleasure. Finding the water to be scented with the pollen of lotuses, the she-elephant poured a drink into the he-elephant's trunk. The *chakravaka* goose treated his wife to a lotus-stem he had started to eat, but did not feel like having all by himself. The

Kimpurusha kept kissing his beloved, in between the songs she was singing. Her eyes were rolling because she was drunk on the nectar of flowers; the decorations on her face were a little swollen and distorted because she was tired and perspiring. The creepers – with sprigs full of flowers for their breasts, newly-sprouted leaves for their lips, and flexible branches for their arms – embraced their husbands – the trees.

Even though Shiva had heard the Apsaras sing, he remained steady in his quest for himself. A cane of gold in hand, Nandi had been positioned at the entrance to Shiva's grove. He put a finger to his lips, asking Shiva's attendants, the *ganas*, not to get frivolous (on account of this sudden change in the environs).

At this reprimand, everyone and everything stood still – as though painted. The leaves on trees did not tremble. The bees did not hum. The birds did not chirp. The animals did not move.

The grove where Shiva was at *dhyana* (meditation), was bordered with *nameru* (*rudraksha*) trees with interwoven branches. Avoiding been seen by Nandi, Madana entered.

Madana – whose end was approaching – saw Shiva seated on an altar of Devadaru wood, covered by a tiger-skin. He had matted hair tied up at the top of his head with a snake. There were double-strings of *rudraksha*-beads at his ears. He wore a deerskin. He sat in the yoga posture known as *veerasana*. His neck was blue (from the poison he had saved the world from), and he had a third eye on his forehead. On his head was a crescent moon, shedding soft light. He was deep in meditation, totally shut out from the external world.

As Madana looked at him from close by, the bow and arrow fell from his hand, which had grown limp. But he did not even notice it.

Just then Parvati, accompanied by two deities of the forest, came up, as if reviving Madana's fading strength.

She came up ornamented with blossoms of the spring, red *ashoka* that put the ruby to shame, yellow *karnikara* that attracted the sparkle of gold to itself, and white *sindhuvara* that was made into a necklace of pearls.

She came like a moving creeper, full of leaves and bent under a profusion of blossoms. She was a little burdened by her breasts and dressed in bark red as the morning sun. She wore a girdle strung from *keshara* (*bakula*) flowers, which slipped off her hips again and again. It looked as if Madana had placed the string of his bow there.

She came waving her sporting lotus, warding off a bee that had – because of her scented breath – got attracted to her *bimba*-fruit-like lips. Out of fear, her eyes were moving with the bee hovering about her lips.

She was perfect in every limb. On seeing her, Rati grew ashamed of her own looks, and Madana, hopeful once again of succeeding with Shiva.

She approached the entrance to where her future husband sat. Just then, Shiva, having envisioned the Paramatman, took a break from his meditation. As he released the breath he had kept controlled and relaxed his yogic posture of Veerasana, Nandi announced the arrival of Parvati. By a mere lift of his eyebrow, Shiva gave her permission to enter. First her two companions, and then Parvati, bowed at Shiva's feet. As Parvati bent down, the fresh Karnikara blossoms glowing in her dark hair got loose, and the new sprouts adorning her hair fell down.

Shiva blessed her, saying that she would get a husband who would not look at another woman.

Madana, waiting for an opportunity to shoot, like insects desiring to enter into the mouth of fire, stood near Parvati, fixing his aim upon Shiva and touching his bow and quiver again and again.

Parvati had gathered lotuses from the river Mandakini, dried their cores in the sun, and strung them together into a rosary for Shiva. This, she now offered to Shiva.

Shiva was about to take it, when – at that very moment – Kama placed his infallible arrow named Sammohana (Delusion) upon his flowery bow.

Like the waters of the ocean at the appearance of the moon, Shiva too became a little disturbed. His three eyes fell upon Parvati's lips (which were like the Bimba fruit). As for Parvati, she too displayed her feelings in every limb, her hair standing up like the burgeoning pollens of the Kadamba flower. She stood averting her face, which her agitated eyes had made even more beautiful.

By means of his self-restraint, Shiva brought his disturbed senses under control. He looked around for its cause, and saw Kama.

He had his clenched fist resting at the corner of his right eye. His shoulders were bent forward, and his left leg was drawn in. His delicate bow was bent almost to a circle. Kama was thus in the very posture of taking a shot.

From the third eye on Shiva's frowning face, there suddenly descended a fire with flashing flames.

"O lord! Restrain your anger!" the gods screamed out. " Control yourself!" But even while these words were traveling down the sky, that fire – born of Shiva's eye – had reduced Madana to ashes.

Rati mercifully swooned away. Shiva left instantly; he wanted to be away from the company of women.

Parvati felt absolutely drained. Her father had always held his head high, but his desire had proved futile. So had her own physical beauty. She was all the more embarrassed at this having taken place in front of her two companions. Somehow she made towards home, eyes shut in fear of Shiva's anger.

Himalaya (who had been keeping track of his daughter) quickly picked her up in his arms and rushed on his way like the elephant of the gods rushes with a lotus sticking to his tusk.

Canto IV

Rativilapa - Rati's Lament

Rati came out of her swoon. She opened her eyes and looked here and there. At first she could not realize that Madana was gone forever. "O lord of my life! Are you alive?" she called out and got up – and saw on the ground only some ashes in the shape of a man – ashes from the fire of Shiva's rage. She was overcome once again, and fell to the ground lamenting. Her hair spread out on the ground and her breasts became dusty from embracing the earth, which seemed to sympathize with her. .

"This is the state of your once-splendid form, and I am still in one piece. Indeed, women are tough. My life is so completely dependent on you. But in an instant you have broken our bond, throwing me away like a lotus washed away by the waters when a bridge gets broken. You have never done anything to displease me. Nor have I done anything to displease you. Why do you not come, then, and let me catch a glimpse of you? When you have erred, I have tied you up with my girdle or smacked you with a lotus from my ear, making your eyes smart. O Madana! Have you left me because you have come to remember all that now? 'Rati! You dwell forever in my heart', you used to say. Now I understand those were false words – why else should you be without a body (An-anga) and I without a single hurt. You have gone only recently to the world beyond death and I will follow in your path. In dark and stormy nights, who other than you can reach women to their lovers' houses? With you not there, wine is a now a problem for women whose eyes are rolling and whose feet are unsteady.

Feeling it useless to grow, the moon will remain thin even after the dark half of the month is gone.

Whose arrows will the new mango-sprouts become? Bees too will not be able to form the string of your bow. That is why they are whimpering like me.

I have no peace of mind when I remember your secret sports.

You had made me so many ornaments out of seasonal flowers. I am wearing them still. But you are nowhere to be seen!

You were bordering my feet with red, when the terrible gods recalled you. You had finished only with my right foot. Come, finish anointing the other foot.

I will go to you again, along the route of the moths, that is, by self-immolation. Even then I will have the regret that Rati had to live without Madana, even if for a moment.

How will I decorate your body for the final rites? Suddenly you have lost not just your life, but your body as well.

I remember how, while straightening your arrows, with your bow on your lap, you used to look sideways at Vasanta and have a few smiling words with him. Where is that bosom-friend of yours, who used to provide flowers for your bow? Has he too gone your way, because of Shiva's violent rage?"

Vasanta, wounded as if by an arrow at his heart, came forward to comfort Rati. Rati cried all the more, beating her breasts.

"Look, Vasanta, at what remains of your friend! Those are his ashes, gray like pigeons, scattering in the air particle by particle.

Your friend is gone, like a lamp struck by the wind. Regard me as the wick, smoking with unbearable agony. Fate committed only half-a-butchery by killing Madana and sparing me. The creeper supported by a tree comes down with it. Moonlight departs with the moon, lightning with the thundercloud. Then do the duty of a friend and send me along to my husband."

Rati now pleaded with Vasanta to consign her to the flames.

"You have often made us a bed of flowers. Now, I beg you, gather wood for my funeral pyre. Fan the fire with the southern breezes of spring so that Madana does not have to bear any delay in my going to him. After that, offer us water in the cup of your hands; in the next world, your friend and I will drink it together, sharing without dividing. As part of the funeral ritual, offer a few sprigs of mango-blossoms; your friend was fond of them."

Just then there was a speech from the skies, which comforted Rati as the first shower comforts a fish in a dry pond:

"Your husband will not be gone forever. He has been cursed for taking a shot at Brahma, the Creator, and producing a desire in him for his own daughter Sarasvati. On Yama's pleas, Brahma had relented. Like a cloud that provides rain as well as thunderbolts, he had put a limit to Madana's curse. When Shiva, won over by Parvati's austerities, will marry her and taste wedded bliss, Shiva will rejoin Madana with his body. So, pretty woman, preserve your body for the union it is going to have some day with its lover."

Thus did some unseen force stall Rati's plan of dying, and out of his faith in that invisible force, Vasanta too reassured her with various sensible words. Rati lived on, like the thin crescent moon waiting for evening to fall.

Canto V

Tapahphalodaya - Efforts Bearing Fruits

Seeing Madana thus burnt by Shiva right in front of her, Parvati, her dreams broken, blamed her beauty in her heart. What is beauty if it fails to win the favour of the beloved?

She wished to make her beauty bear fruit by performing rigorous tapas and reaching the state of *samadhi*. How else could she attain such a husband and such love – these twin objectives?

Mena clasped her daughter to her bosom and tried to prevent her from taking up the great vow of austerity. "You can worship the deities that are in the house. Austerities and your body – why, they hardly go together! The delicate blossom of the Sirisha can bear the tread of the bee, not of the bird."

But Mena could not stop her daughter who was as fixed as the Dhruva star in her wish.

Through a close friend, Parvati asked her father permission to go and live in the forest in order to practice austerities that would lead to her objectives. Himalaya, who knew his daughter's mind and was pleased by her dedication to her objective, gave her the permission. She went to a peak full of peacocks, which would later be famous as 'Gauri-shikhara' (Shikhara means 'peak' and Gauri was the name Parvati had in her life as Sati.)

Determinedly she took off her string of pearls and wrapped a bark around herself.

Her face looked as sweet with matted hair as it had done with decorative hairstyles. Not just bees, mosses too can be a decoration for a lotus.

At her waist she put on for the first time a threefold string of rough Munja grass, which reddened her waist and made her hair bristle constantly. Her hand no longer reddened her lips or played with balls. It hurt itself picking the sharp sprouts of Kusha grass, and became a lover of the rough beads of Aksha-strings.

She used to get hurt by flowers that got dislodged from her hair when she turned her side on her luxurious bed. She now sat and slept on the bare ground, using her arms as her pillow. Untiringly she watered the saplings, as though from the pots of her breasts. She nurtured the deer by offering them the seeds she collected in the forest. They came to trust her so much that they let her compare the size of their eyes with hers, even in front of her friends.

She used to purify herself by ablutions, offer oblations to the fire, cover the upper portion of her body with a bark, and study sacred texts. In spite of her youth, sages came to meet her and the hermitage became a hallowed place.

But Parvati realized that the kind of meditation she was doing would not get her the desired result. She began to practice austerities that were more severe, not caring how delicate her body was.

She, who used to get tired playing with the ball, took to the ways of ascetics.

In the heat of summer, she sat among four blazing fires, and gazed steadily at the sun, overcoming its blinding glare. Over-heated by sunrays, her face became pink like a lotus and slowly developed dark circles round the eyes.

Her means of breaking fast were the rainwater, which comes unasked, and the rays of the moon, which contains nectar at its core – nothing more than the means by which trees subsist. (That is, like ascetics, she made no deliberate effort to get food and drink for herself.)

She was so excessively heated by fires – those lit by fuel and those lit by the sun, that, when it rained , vapour rose from her as from the earth.

The first drops of rain rested for a moment on her eyelashes, struck against her lips, fell from her peaked breasts and got shattered. Dropping lethargically across the folds of the skin, they reached the navel after a long time.

The nights, standing witness to her terrible austerities, observed her with eyes of flashing lightning, as she slept outdoors and on rocks, in the midst of stormy winds and incessant rain.

In the nights of winter, when the wind scattered cold frost around, Parvati determinedly stayed in the water, feeling sorry for goose-couples that were crying because they had become separated from one another. At night, she stood neck-deep in the water, her face fragrant like the lotus, and her under-lip trembling like a leaf.

To sustain oneself on leaves of dried-up trees (i.e., leaves that fall off themselves and do not even have to be plucked) is itself the supreme standard of *tapas*. Even that came to be discarded by her. Hence, those who know this history call that sweet-spoken girl Aparna (A-parna, one who does not taken even a single *parna* or leaf).

Day and night, Parvati punished her own body – delicate as a small lotus-stalk – by these and such other austere practices, and so, left far behind the powers earned by ascetics by means of their tough bodies.

Then someone arrived at the hermitage. He had matted hair, wore the skin of a black antelope and carried a stick of Palasha wood. He was bold and eloquent of speech and seemed to burn with the powers of the Supreme One. He seemed to be the personification of Brahmacharya, the first stage of life.

Parvati received him with all rituals of welcome. A little rested, he looked straight at Parvati and spoke, observing all the rules of decorum:

"Do you find it easy to get grass and wood for your sacrificial ceremonies? Do you find the water fit for bathing rituals? And do you observe austerities in keeping with your own physical strength? Are the plants you water sprouting leaves that are like your lips, red although they have no red on them? Are you pleased with the deer you feed and whose eyes are like yours?

Do not regard me like a distant stranger. O you who are shyly bending low! It takes but a few words for friendship to develop among good people. As my natural curiosity has been roused, I want to ask you something.

•

You are well-born, rich, young, and beautiful. What more do you have to gain, that you practice austerities?

Calamities sometimes force sensitive women to resort to such austerities. But, slender one! I can think of no such calamity in your case. Pretty-browed one! Your appearance is such that you cannot have been slighted under your father's roof. Nor can you have been wronged by strangers. Who would dare to stretch his hand towards a jewel on the snake's hood?

Why have you removed clothes and ornaments suited to your youth? If you are seeking heaven, your labours are unncessary. Your father's grounds are frequented by gods. If it is a husband you seek, there is no need for austerities. A jewel does not search; it is sought after."

Parvati who had been silent so far, sighed, and immediately her guest continued.

"Your sigh betrays your secret. But I am all the more perplexed. There can hardly be anyone you would have to seek. Then how can there be someone you seek and still cannot get?

He must indeed be hard-hearted, to ignore your matted hair gone brown as husks and hanging limply upon cheeks bereft of lotuses at the ears. He must be without any sensitivities, to see you burnt by the sun at places where there used to be ornaments, and wan like the

moon at day-time. He is being cheated by his own arrogance of your quick glances from under curved eyelashes.

Why do you labour so long, O fair one? I too have some accumulated merit. Taking half of that, get the husband/boon (here there is a pun on the word *vara*, which means both husband and boon) of your desire. But I want to know all about him."

Parvati felt too shy to speak, and signed with her eyes to her companion. "It is Shiva whom Parvati desires", said the companion, who narrated the story to the guest.

•

She went on: "Madana has been reduced to ashes. But Parvati too is burning, with a heat even a bed of snow cannot assuage. At her father's place, whenever she began to sing Shiva's praise, her voice got choked. Whenever she slept, she dreamt of Shiva. She came away to this hermitage – and began to practice austerities. The day she began, she planted some saplings. See, they are now fully-grown and laden with fruit. But there is no sign as yet of Shiva. She has prayed so hard for him, and he is unresponsive as ever. We cannot bear to see the state to which Parvati has reduced herself."

As Parvati's companion was saying all this, the guest at the hermitage, with no outward expression of joy, asked Parvati, "Is this true?"

Rosary in hand, Parvati spoke slowly and deliberately: "O learned one! It is indeed so." Indicating herself, she said, "This humble person is seeking the highest of posts, and these austerities are a means of getting there."

"Maheshwara , the great god, is well-known," said the guest sarcastically, "and yet you yearn for him. Knowing how he loves inauspicious exercises, I cannot endorse your course of action. You are bent upon an unworthy object. How will you bear your first contact with Shiva's hand, which has a snake wrapped round it? Judge for yourself – can your fine and bright bridal clothes go with his bloody elephant-hide? (Shiva, when he killed Gajasura, stripped off the skin from the elephant's form that the demon had taken, and carried it about like a trophy, dripping blood.) Not even an enemy

would like to see your red-anointed feet fall upon burning-grounds covered with the hair of corpses. And tell me, is there anything more unseemly than the ashes on Shiva's chest finding their way on to your breasts, so far fit only for sandalwood-paste? There is another humiliation you will have to face – people will laugh at seeing you on the old bull when you are fit to be borne by a royal elephant. Like the moon, you are in a sorry state because of your desire to consort with Shiva. His body is disfigured because of his third eye, his lineage is unknown, and his wealth is exhibited by his being clothed in nothing but the far quarters. You have an eye for qualities sought in bridegrooms. Tell me if Shiva has any?

What a distance there is between someone like him and someone like you, who has all the auspicious marks. The wise do not perform Vedic rites fit for a *yupa* (u-shaped wooden neck-rest for animals to be ceremonially sacrificed) before a *shmashana-shula* (stake planted in the burning-ground to impale criminals)."

As the guest spoke so adversely, Parvati's anger could be observed from the trembling of her lips. The corners of her eyes grew red, and from under puckered eyebrows, she cast a slanted glance at her guest. She spoke thus:

"You certainly do not know Shiva. That is why you speak thus to me. Evil ones are envious of the extraordinary character of the great, which is beyond common understanding. People carry auspicious signs like garlands and sandalwood-paste because they want to redress some danger or because they are keen to get some favour. Shiva is himself the resort of the world and has no favour to ask of anyone. What need has he of these means that raise hopes and reduce self-reliance? Himself penniless, he is the source of wealth; roaming about in cremation-grounds, he is the lord of the three worlds; terrible in appearance, he is still called Shiva or the Gentle One. There is no one who knows him fully.

Whether he wears shining ornaments or has a hooded snake coiled around him, whether he dons elephant-hide or silk, whether he carries the skull or bears the moon on his crest, his form is beyond comprehension. The universe is his manifestation.

Indeed, the ashes from funeral-pyres get purified by coming in contact with him. That is why, when they scatter as Shiva is dancing, the gods anoint their foreheads with them.

As he goes by on his bull, Indra gets down from his celestial elephant and bows to him. Indra wears on his crown the Mandara flower, which is to be found only in heaven. As he bows to Shiva, pollens from those full-blown Mandara redden Shiva's toes.

Depraved creature! Even in narrating Shiva's faults, you have said one good thing about him. He who is said to be behind the creation of Brahma, the Creator, how is he to be of obvious origins?

There is no further need of dispute. Let him be all that you have heard him to be. My mind is set on him."

At this point, Parvati observed her guest's lips to be moving, and turned to her friend: "Ali (friend) Stop him! From his quivering lips, he looks as if he wants to say something again. Not only is the one who slanders a noble person a sinner, but also the one who listens to it. Stop him. Or, rather, let me go away!" Saying this, the maiden made a move to go, and the bark she wore shifted, revealing her bosom.

Assuming his own form, Shiva smilingly caught hold of her.

On seeing him, with one foot raised up to throw her perspiring body forward, the trembling daughter of the lord of all mountains, like a river whose path has been blocked by a mountain, could neither go nor stay.

"From today I am your slave, bought by your austerities", said Shiva and immediately Parvati felt all the fatigue due to her austerities to be gone.

Canto VI

Umapradana - Giving Uma Away

Parvati informed Shiva that her father Himalaya was the one to give her away in marriage. She did not speak directly, but through a friend, like the mango tree speaks to Spring through the cuckoo.

By the powers of his mind, Shiva summoned up the seven great sages.

Bathing in Mandakini, the Ganga that flows through the skies, and is scented with lotuses as well as bathing elephants, they arrived wearing golden barks, jeweled rosaries and sacred threads of pearls. The sage Vashishttha's devoted wife and associate, Arundhati came with them, and though Shiva showed no special respect to her because she was a woman, at the sight of her, Shiva grew even more keen to have a wife of his own.

Madana, in his mind, heaved a sigh of relief.

"Our study of the sacred texts, our sacrifices and our austerities are today rewarded", said the sages. "But now that you have called us here, tell us what to do."

"You know that nothing I do is for my own sake", said Shiva. "That is the way I am. But the gods have appealed to me get them an army-chief who can lead them in battle against the asura Taraka. To get such a son, I have to get Parvati for my wife.

A connection with the lofty Himalaya is not going to hurt me either.

I want you, the seven wise sages, to request Himalaya to give his daughter to me in marriage; relationships brought about by good people do not go sour.

I need not tell you the rules of addressing Himalaya and putting the proposal to him. For it is your rules that the wise follow. The revered Arundhati too should take part in this. Matters such as this are handled better by mature, motherly women like her."

Leaping into a sky that was as blue as a gleaming sword, and moving as fast as the mind, the sages reached Oshadhiprastha, the abode of medicinal herbs, the capital of Himalaya.

It was fort-like, surrounded by the fast-flowing Ganga. Its walls were slabs of jewels, and herbs (phosphorescent) blazed from its ramparts. Prosperous and peaceful, it was peopled by Yakshas, Kimpurushas and Vanadevatas (deities of the forest). Flags fluttered from its housetops. Drumbeats sounded, mingling with thunder.

The Gandhamadana hill formed its outer garden.

The city guards stared at the seven sages as – along with Arundhati – they descended in a row upon the palace, looking like a succession of reflections of the sun in water.

Himalaya advanced upon his heavy feet to greet them. His mouth was like echoing caverns.

Eloquent Angiras became the spokesperson of the sages.

First singing Himalaya's praise, and then that of Shiva, Angiras stated how Shiva wanted Himalaya's daughter Parvati's hand in marriage.

"You will do well to join Parvati to Shiva, like uniting words to meaning.

Let Parvati be addressed by the entire world as 'mother'.

Let Parvati have gods making obeisance to her

Let the jewels at their crest tinge her feet with their rays.

Let yourself become the father-in-law of the father of the universe."

While Angiras was saying all this, Parvati stood beside her father, keeping her face averted and counting the petals of a lotus in her hand.

Though completely satisfied, Himalaya looked at Mena. In matters relating to daughters, husbands are guided by their wives.

Mena too was in utter agreement, as every good wife is, with her husband.

Himalaya took hold of Parvati and said, "Come, child! You are being given away as alms to the great soul of the universe, Shiva."

As Parvati hurried to bow to the sages, they came out with potent blessings. Arundhati made the shy girl sit on her lap, and cheered up her tearful mother.

The sages said that the wedding would be after three days, and went back to Shiva to inform him about the success of their mission.

Eager to unite with Parvati, Shiva spent those days with difficulty. When such feelings can affect Shiva, why should they not overwhelm others?

Canto VII

Umaparinaya - Uma's Wedding

It was an auspicious day in the bright half of the month. Himalaya, with his friends and relatives, conducted the inaugural ceremonies of the wedding. Women from every household joined in getting things ready. So the city with its shining arches, streaming banners and flower-strewn streets – seemed like one big household.

During the *maitra-muhurta* (an auspicious duration of 48 minutes, one hour and thirty-six minutes after sunrise) women who had husbands and sons living and were therefore considered fortunate and auspicious, attended to Parvati's personal toilet.

Dressed in bleached clothes after a ritual bath, Parvati looked as glorious as rain-washed earth gleaming with white Kasha flowers. Her hair was dried with the smoke of incense, and decorated with pale Madhoka blossoms and green Durva sprouts.

Her body was whitened with fragrant Aguru (aloe), and patterned it with yellow Gorochana (pigment prepared from urine of cows).

The women put Lodhra-dust and Gorochana on her cheeks and hung a sprig of Yava (barley) from her ear. They reddened her lips with honey and wax and bordered her eye with collyrium.

One of her friends anointed her feet with red dye, and joked, "Use this to strike the moon on your husband's head!" Without a word, Parvati struck her friend with a wreath of flowers.

As ornaments were added to Parvati's body, she looked like a creeper coming out in blossom, or a night whose stars were just rising.

Raising Parvati's face with its gleaming-white ivory earrings, Mena somehow made the *tilaka*-mark of Haritala and Manahshila (auspicious pigments) on it – something she had wanted to do ever since she observed her daughter coming into puberty

She tied the festive marriage-band of wool on her daughter's wrist. But as her eyes were hazy with tears, she positioned it wrong. But Parvati's nurse-maid pushed it to its right position.

Now Parvati was given a new mirror to hold, and a new silken cloth to wear. They made her look like the foamy shores of Kshiroda, the sea of milk, or, the moonlit night of Autumn.

Parvati now bowed to the family-deities and seniors, who blessed her with: "May you attain the uninterrupted love of your husband."

Himalaya sat majestically in the hall with his friends and relatives, waiting for the bridegroom to arrive.

Meanwhile, at Kailasa, the Matris (seven divine mothers attending upon Shiva) respectfully placed before Shiva toiletry fit for the pre-wedding rituals. Lord Shiva, out of respect to them, touched those articles of toilet. But that was all. His own apparel itself got transformed into wedding finery. His ashes became powders whitening his body, his skull became a shining headgear, his elephant-hide became silk bordered with yellow Gorochana. His third eye became a *tilaka*-mark of yellow Haritala. The snakes – with jewels on their hoods – changed into bejeweled ornaments. He already had a crest-jewel – the moon. A *khadga (*curved sword) served as his mirror (as is the custom among warriors).

Using Nandi's arm for support, Shiva got on to his bull, fitted with a seat of tiger-skin.

He set out, followed by the Matris and the goddess Kali (a consort of Shiva), flashing lightning. The Ganas (attendants) marched ahead of Shiva, and their band-music spread to the skies, reaching the aerial chariots of gods and telling them that it was time to attend upon Shiva. Tvashtri, the architect of the gods, held the sunshade over Shiva's head. Rivers Ganga and Yamuna waved the *chamara*

(whisks made out of the hair of Chamari cattle). Brahma, Vishnu, Indra and other gods came to wish him well. He honored Brahma with a nod of his head, Vishnu with words, and Indra with a smile and the other gods with just a glance.

The seven sages pronounced their benediction, and Shiva said with a smile, "You have already been chosen by me as the officiating priests of this nuptial sacrifice."

The bull bore Shiva along the sky, tinkling his bells and shaking his horns. Rays from Shiva's eyes acted as his reins.

As the bull alighted, the inhabitants of Oshadhiprastha watched with faces uplifted. Himalaya went forward, with his kinsfolk – the other mountains. The city-gates were thrown open and the two parties met like two streams breaking through the same bridge.

Shiva – the lord of the three worlds – bowed to Himalaya who was going to be his father-in-law. Embarrassed yet delighted, Himalaya led his prospective son-in law through his prosperous city, whose markets and streets were ankle-deep in flowers.

The beauties of Oshadhiprastha set aside everything else in their eagerness to see Shiva.

One, in her haste, did not think of tying up her hair, which escaped from its wreath and fell down even though she stood holding it. Another, although only one foot had been anointed, pulled herself away from her maid and rushed to the latticed window, leaving a succession of red footprints on the floor. One of them had applied *anjana* (collyrium) to one eye but not the other, when she left for the window, *anjana-shalaka* (collyrium-stick) in hand. Another had moved so fast that her clothes had come off, but instead of pausing to tie them, she stood looking through the window, the clothes gathered up in hand. Yet another, who had been stringing gems to make a girdle, got up hastily, scattering them at every step, with only the string left by the time she made it to the window.

All eyes, they looked on as Shiva came along the main street adorned with flags, festoons and arches flying. "Parvati was right to go through austerities for him!" they talked among themselves.

"Madana cannot have been burnt by him; he must have died out of shame on seeing him."

"With such a marriage alliance, Himalaya will be able to hold his head even higher."

Hearing bits of this conversation and getting showered with puffed rice, Shiva advanced towards the abode of Himalaya.

Amid the chanting of hymns, Himalaya welcomed Shiva in with offerings of jewels, honey, curds, clarified butter, and new silken clothes.

The expert attendants of the palace conducted the silk-clad Shiva to the bride, like the rays of the moon carry seawaters to the shore.

Shiva, united with Parvati, looked like the animate world when it is joined by the season of autumn. The two were eager to see one another, yet bashfully withdrew as soon as they met by chance.

Parvati's delicate fingers, red-tipped like young sprouts, seemed to be the first manifestation of Smara (Madana) who had withdrawn deep into her form out of his fear of Shiva. Himalaya's priest brought them forward to be received by Shiva. As their hands were joined together, the hairs on Parvati's body stood erect, and Shiva's fingers began to perspire.

The two of them circled the sacrificial fire, keeping it to the right And Parvati, her eyes closed in contact with Shiva, made offerings of puffed grain to the fire. The smoke spread over her face, smudging her collyrium and singing the barley at her ears.

The priest said to the bride, "This fire is the witness to the performance of your wedding. With Shiva as your husband, you should implicitly follow the rules of righteousness."

The new wife drunk in this advice like parched earth drinking the first rain.

As the custom was, she was asked by her husband to 'see' the Dhruva star, the symbol of constancy. Looking up shyly, she somehow said "Seen."

The ceremony of 'pani-grahana' or 'pani-peedana' (literally, taking the hand forcefully) was thus performed by a priest learned in ceremonial rituals.

Shiva and Parvati now bowed to Brahma. He blessed Parvati by saying, "Auspicious one! Be the mother of a brave son." But although he was the master of speech (Vachaspati), he did not know what to say to Shiva.

After that, husband and wife came to the altar and sat down on seats of gold. They enjoyed the pleasant custom of being sprinkled with whole grains of wet rice. Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and prosperity, held a pearly shade above their heads. Sarasvati, the goddess of speech and learning, presented compositions in their praise. The Apsaras enacted a dance-drama before them.

Then the gods, with folded palms, prayed that, at the end of the curse on him, Madana should become manifest and his services should be accepted.

Shiva's anger was gone and he accepted the service of Madana's arrows, even in respect of himself!

Shiva now dismissed the gods and grasped Parvati's hand. He went to the nuptial apartment, which had pots of gold at the entrance, and was patterned with flowers and pigments. The nuptial bed had been spread on the ground. Shiva attempted to turn Parvati's face towards him. But every time he did so, Parvati, who was adorned with the shyness of being newly wed, turned her face away. Even the friends who used to share her bed found it difficult to make her speak. Shiva instructed his attendants to make funny faces at her, and so, in secret, made Parvati smile.

Canto VIII

Umasuratavarnanam - Pleasures with Uma

After the wedding ceremony was over and Shiva and Parvati were staying at the residence of Himalaya, Parvati's feelings were a mixture of love and fear, and this heightened Shiva's delight in her. When Shiva spoke, Parvati did not answer. When Shiva caught hold of her clothes, Parvati tried to break away. When they went to bed, she lay with her face turned away. And yet she thrilled Shiva.

She did not give her lips to be kissed or put her arms round Shiva when he tried to kiss or embrace her. And still Shiva loved to make love to her.

Mena, was pleased – as mothers are – to see how her daughter's youth was finding Shiva's favour.

After a few days, this stage passed. Once she had got a taste of the pleasures of love-making, Parvati gradually shed her over-sensitivity. When pressed to Shiva's bosom, now she put her arms round him. When he wanted her to turn to him, she did not turn away. She was lax in checking his hand as it greedily moved towards her girdle.

Just as the bride loved the bridegroom, so did he love her. Ganga, however it may curve on the way, never goes anywhere but the sea. The sea too finds its salvation only in the juices of her mouth.

Parvati became Shiva's disciple in learning ways of love-making. She offered the same skills as fees to her teacher.

When Shiva's love-bite hurt Parvati's lips, with palms that were smarting, she cooled them by the light of the moon on Shiva's head. When, in the act of kissing, the powder in Parvati's hair made Shiva's third eye smart, he held it to the sweet puffs of air that came from her mouth.

Favouring Madana by partaking of sensual pleasures, Shiva stayed in Himalaya's abode with Parvati, but only for a month. Then he took Himalaya's permission to leave, distressing him on account of separation from his daughter.

Shiva now moved about on his bull, showing Parvati around various mountains.

He spent a night in Parvati's embrace on the mount of Meru, lying on a bed of golden leaves.

He spent time on the ridges of Mandara, hovering round Parvati's mouth like bees around a lotus.

He spent a moonlit night on Kailasa, tightly held by Parvati, who was frightened by the roar of Ravana (who was trying to take Kailasa away to Lanka).

They enjoyed sporting with water on the mountain Malaya, where a scented southern wind blew.

In the celestial garden of Nandana, Shiva ornamented Parvati's hair with Parijata flowers.

Then they moved over to the mountain Gandhamadana.

It was evening when they reached, and sat down on a rock of gold, Parvati on Shiva's left (as is the custom for lawfully wedded wives entitled to perform religious ceremonies with their husbands).

Shiva pointed out to Parvati that it was growing dark. The birds and beasts were retiring, the lotus was closing, and the ascetics were offering their prayers to Sandhya, the twilight (conceived as a goddess). He asked Parvati to excuse him – so that he too could

observe that ritual. "Your friends will amuse you for a while", he said.

Parvati was piqued. She thought it was neglect on his part to leave her even for a moment. She curled her lips and began to talk at random, without any particular purpose, to companion Vijaya (who was nearby).

Shiva carried on with the rituals. When he came back, Parvati refused to speak to him.

"You are angry with me for no reason at all", said Shiva with a smile. "Cast away your anger. I was only making my obeisance to Sandhya. To you, I am as faithful as the ruddy goose is to his mate."

Shiva began to placate Parvati. "See how the evening is descending like a stream of liquid mineral. The sky in the west is streaked as though with blood on a curving sword. A deep darkness has spread everywhere, equating everything with one another."

Then Shiva pointed out the moon that was making its appearance. "Here is the moon, dispelling the darkness and smearing the eastern quarter with the pollen of white Ketaka flowers. It appears like a secret the night is releasing. It caresses the night as though with a kiss. O Chandi (the angry one, Chandi being a warlike goddess)! Look, there comes the presiding deity of Gandhamadana forest, herself bringing the nectar from the Kalpavriksha. But your face is naturally fragrant and your eyes are red by themselves. What quality can wine add to it? Drink it however, if only to show respect to a friendly gesture."

On drinking that wine, Parvati underwent a change, which, though a distortion, was nevertheless attractive. She came under the twin influence of Shiva and the wine, both, as it were, trying to conduct her to the bed. She lost her shyness. Her eyes began to roll, her speech became slurred, drops of sweat appeared on her face, and she began to smile for no reason at all. Shiva took a long draught of that beauty, not with his mouth, but with his eyes.

By means of his powers, he furnished a cave with a bed that had a swan-white sheet spread on it.

Shiva carried Parvati into the cave, although her golden girdle had become loose and her hips were making her heavy. He lay down on the bed with her, and did not tire of pleasuring with her, although it involved painful pulling at the hair, scratching with nails at wrong places, smudging the sandalwood-paste anointing, and breaking the girdle. Parvati clasped him by the chest and it was only out of compassion for her that, when the rows of stars were bending low in the west, that he showed any interest in closing his eyes.

When he awoke at dawn, Kimnaras were singing, and a breeze blowing from the nearby lake Manasa.

As they relaxed their embrace, Shiva's attention was caught by scratches he had made on her thighs. Parvati's eyes were red due to lack of sleep, her lower lip bore deep marks of teeth, her hair was disheveled, and the tilaka-mark on her forehead was displaced. On seeing this, Shiva was once again filled with passion. He stopped Parvati from arranging her clothes.

Even after the day had dawned clear and bright, Shiva did not leave that crushed and crumpled bed, upon which, Parvati's broken girdle was huddled.

He wanted to go on, drinking the nectar of his beloved's face – a drink that only increased his joy in her. He did not see anyone, even when Vijaya informed him about all those who would have loved to see him.

Treating day and night in the same way, Shiva – sporting with Parvati – spent one and a half centuries there, like one night. And still his thirst for love-making was not quenched – just as the fire within the sea is not quenched by waves.

In Conclusion

It is from this passion that the purpose of the gods was served. Kumara was born and grew up to be the army-chief of the gods, and lead them to victory against Taraka. But that is a story Kalidasa did not go into. For, his focus was not Kumara and his feats, but his birth, being, genesis, or *sambhav*a.

Note especially the use of the word. It makes us recall Krishna in the *Gita*, saying that to deliver the good from the evil, he would be born time and again *(sambhavami yugey yugey)*. There occurs a similar manifestation here – of Shiva's rather than Vishnu's, but for the same purpose – delivering the gods from a demon. But what does it take for such a manifestation to be possible? It takes a girl in the freshness of youth to realize that physical beauty is not enough and she must raise herself spiritually. It takes a god who had totally withdrawn himself into a spiritual cocoon to realize that life must go on and he must bend down to respond to physical needs. Parvati strives for divine heights. Shiva climbs down! A most daring and difficult subject for any human to tackle. But Kalidasa had done just that, and felt no need to do more.

RAGHUVAMSHAM

The coronation of Rama

Introducing Raghuvamsham

Concept of *vamsha*

The theme of *Raghuvamsham* is the *vamsha* of Raghu, a mythical king.

Vamsha means family-line or family-stock, organized usually on patriarchal lines. In case of kings, or other people of distinction, *vamsha* took on the connotation of royal lineage or dynasty. Chronicling of the *vamsha* was done only in such cases.

A few dynasties traced their lineage to divinities, for example, *Suryavamsha* of Ramayana to Surya (Sun-god) and *Chandravamsha* of Mahabharata to Chandra (the moon-god).

Sometimes a *vamsha* gets to be named after an exceptional son of the family, e.g., *Suryavamsha* is also known as *Ikshvakuvamsha* (after Ikshvaku), *Kakutsthavamsha* (after Kakutstha), and *Raghuvamsha* (after Raghu). *Chandravamsha* is also called *Kuruvamsha* (after Kuru). *Yaduvamsha* is named after Yadu, an ancestor of Krishna, and is also called *Harivamsha* after Hari (Krishna).

Vamsharaksha (continuity of family-line), *vamshaparampara* (family-tradition), *vamshamaryada* (family-prestige) are important concepts. Son-preference, bound with the concept of the *vamsha*, is no less potent today than in the times of King Dilipa or Dasharatha.

A *vamsha* is not a static entity. It has its rise and fall. Even Raghu's *vamsha* did. Soaring from peak to peak, it ultimately went

into a decline. Kalidasa has traced out that career-graph ruthlessly to its end.

Outline

Raghuvamsham has nineteen cantos to it.

Canto I introduces the main characteristics of the great Solar dynasty ruling over northern India, and starts with the story of one of its kings, Dilipa. Without a son and heir, Dilipa goes with his queen to the hermitage of the patron-sage of the family, Vashishttha. The sage advises the royal pair to win the favour of super-cow Nandini.

In Canto II, Dilipa is able to serve Nandini well, and at the beginning of Canto III, is blessed with a son. This is the Raghu after whom the family is to be named. Cantos II, IV and part of V, describe Raghu's brilliant career. He is an empire-builder, as well as a devoted son and affectionate father. Cantos V, VI, VII and VIII show Raghu's son Aja growing up, marrying, taking over as Raghu's successor, but dwindling to a sad end with the accidental death of his wife.

Aja's son Dasharatha is an able ruler, but has difficulty in begetting an heir to the throne of Ayodhya, the capital-city of the Solar kings. Rather tragic circumstances, described in Canto IX, enable him to have four glorious sons in Canto X.

The eldest of them is Rama, whose glorious deeds are the subject matter of the world-acclaimed Indian epic *Ramayana*. Cantos XI – XIII describe them, rather sketchily. Rama is one among the many noble scions of this family, although he may be the noblest of them. Cantos XIV-XV describe, in greater detail, how Rama came to banish his wife, how his sons came to be born in a hermitage instead of a palace, how Rama apportioned his kingdom among his sons and nephews, and wound up his reign – the ideal 'Rama-rajya'.

Ayodhya falls into ruins, but in Canto XVI, Rama's son Kusha restores it to some of its past glory. Kusha marries and is soon a father, but dies early, at the beginning of Canto XVII. Son Atithi mounts the throne.

A series of unremarkable rulers follow. They are given mentions in Canto XVIII, but they seem to have had no particular achievements or adventures worth recording. In Canto XIX, we come to the most worthless of the lot, Agnivarna, who brings the family-line very near extinction.

Sources

Raghuvamsham is not a play of Kalidasa's imagination in the sense *Meghadootam* is. It is drawn from the *Puranas*, especially *Vishnu-Purana,* as well as the *Ramayana*

Even the word *Raghuvamsha* is not Kalidasa's own invention. It occurs in the *Ramayana* by Valmiki. Kalidasa uses it as the title of his work, possibly to emphasize that it is not just Rama's story he tells, but the stories of several other kings – before and after him, the story of the entire family or dynasty, in fact. While Rama forms a major chunk of the work, the title indicates that it is Raghu who has the pride of place. There is no Rama-vamsha. Rama himself is called Raghava, Raghuveera and Raghunandana, and other descendants also occasionally get that laudatory epithet.

The perspective in the *Puranas* is different. There it is the great godhead Vishnu whose story is being told. Rama is the re-incarnation or earthly manifestation of Vishnu, and the rest are only background pieces.

Style

Raghuvamsham is regarded as an epic poem or *mahakavya*, rather than a lyric poem or *khandakavya*. *Raghuvamsham* does follow the broad requirements of a *mahakavya*. Its title clearly indicates its theme. It has most exalted characters – the great scions of a great family – as its main characters. It shows how they attained various degrees of three objectives – *dharma*, *artha* and *kama* – righteousness, prosperity and pleasure. It opens with salutation to Shiva and Parvati, and praise of Raghu's noble ancestors. It is divided into nineteen cantos; any others are regarded as imitative, later-day stuff.

Canto I

I bow to Parvati and Parameshwara (Shiva), parents to the universe.

The *vamsha* born of Surya is far beyond the reach of one such as I. However, once a diamond has pierced a hole into a gem, a thread can make its way in. So will I make my entry into this family-line through the doorway my precursors have carved out. (That is, I will follow the works of earlier poets like Valmiki.)

Those of this dynasty remained pure and unsullied ever since they were born. In their childhood, they followed the discipline of studying. In their youth, they pursued worldly matters. In their old age, they took up meditation, and in the end, they took leave of their bodies through yoga.

I narrate the story of Raghu's lineage.

There was a king named Vivasvata Manu, revered by intellectuals, and foremost among kings on earth.

In his pure family-line was born Dilipa.

Dilipa was broad-chested, had shoulders massive as the bull, and arms as long as Shala trees. He surpassed everybody in strength and seemed to tower over the earth like the mountain Meru.

He had several wives, but his true wife was Sudakshina, princess of Magadha, so named because of her *su-dakshina*, or charitable ways.

Dilipa was keen to have a son born of Sudakshina. But it was taking a long time for his desire to be fulfilled. Finally, Dilipa decided to perform sacrificial rituals that would endow him with a son and heir.

He gave over his kingdom to the charge of his ministers, and left with Sudakshina for the hermitage of Vashishttha, who was guru or preceptor to their family. So as not to disturb the hermitage, set in

the mountain Himalaya, he took only a small band of people with him. The royal couple reached Vashishttha's hermitage around evening, when his wife Arundhati was assisting him in his evening rites.

Falling at Vashishttha's feet, Dilipa unburdened himself.

"You, my preceptor, keep me well-protected from my enemies. Yet what is the whole world worth, if I cannot have a son born of this wife – who is like a daughter to you? The Ikshvakus have always relied on you. Help me have a son."

The sage closed his eyes. By his powers of meditation, he perceived the reason that had brought Dilipa's family-line to a standstill.

"Once you had gone to pay homage to Shakra (Indra, the king of heaven) and were returning along the banks of the Akashganga (the portion of this sacred river that flows through heaven before descending to earth). There was the celestial cow Surabhi across your path, resting under the shade of Kalpataru (celestial tree supposed to bear the fruits of one's desire). You should have honoured her by walking respectfully round her. But this you failed to do, because you were hurrying to your wife. Surabhi was angry at not getting the respect her due. She cursed you: "Since you ignore me, you will remain childless till you worship my offspring." But neither you nor the driver of your chariot heard the curse in the roar of the river. I have Surabhi's daughter Nandini in my hermitage. You should treat her as Surabhi's representative and be on constant attendance. If you can satisfy that good cow, she will bless you with a son."

Canto II

Early next morning, the queen greeted Nandini with garlands and incense. After the calf had drunk, she was untied, and the queen followed her. At the end of the hermitage, the king made Sudakshina turn back. He went along with the cow, forbidding even his remaining attendants to accompany him.

Offering her tasty morsels of grass, scratching her body, warding off insects, following her continuously but never checking her freedom of movement, the king served Nandini intently.

In the evening, as the two of them returned to the hermitage, Queen Sudakshina was waiting. After bowing to the sage and his wife, and observing the rituals of the evening, they again waited upon Nandini, resting after getting milked. Evening lamps were lit and flowers offered to her. The royal couple went to sleep only after Nandini had laid herself down to sleep.

This went on for three weeks, that is twenty-one days. On the twenty-second day, Nandini put her attendant to a test.

She entered a cave where there was fresh grass growing near a waterfall of the Ganga.

Dilipa thought that no wild beast would dare to harm Nandini. Suddenly from the cave echoed a painful, long-drawn-out bellow. Dilipa saw that, unnoticed by him, a lion had sprung upon the cow and seized her roughly.

Dilipa wanted instantly to shoot. But he found that he could not pick up an arrow. His right hand was immobile, as in a painting.

Dilipa was even more astonished to hear the lion speak in a human voice: "Enough, O king! You cannot defeat me. For, I am an attendant of Shiva, charged with taking care of that Devadaru tree over there, watered by Shiva's consort Parvati herself."

"While I too revere your master, the great Shiva, I cannot allow the property of my preceptor to be destroyed. Since I cannot move, I cannot fight and free this cow whose calf is eagerly awaiting her at the end of the day. So I ask you to free the cow yourself, and eat me up instead."

Shiva's attendant laughed, "You want to give up a lot for the sake of a little. If you are moved by pity for a living creature, then you can die and save this one cow. But you can live and save the lives of so many of your subjects. If you are afraid of your preceptor, who has but one cow, you can make it up to him by gifting him countless such cows, with udders like pots."

As these words echoed in the cave, Dilipa saw Nandini looking at him with agonized eyes, and said even more compassionately, "The word Kshatra means 'one who saves (*trayatey*) from blows and

wounds (*kshata*)'. What is the use of life and kingdom to a Kshatra (Kshatriya) who cannot act true to his name? How can I compensate for this cow by providing my preceptor with other cows? She is special – no inferior to Surabhi. You too have a charge you protect – that tree. It is better not to face your master, if you have lost your charge and are yourself untouched. We have become friends through this conversation. As a friend, take me and let the cow go."

"So let it be", said the lion, and Dilipa found he could move his arm again. Keeping his weapon down, he cast himself before the lion.

The king stood, face downwards, expecting the terrible leap of the lion upon his body, but he received a shower of flowers from the hands of Vidyadharas (superhuman species living in high altitudes).

"Get up," he heard and got up to find – no lion, but only the cow before him. "I had just created an illusion to test you", spoke Nandini in a honeyed voice. "For, by the sage's powers, I am safe from death itself, not to speak of animals. I am pleased. Ask a boon."

Dilipa asked for a son. Promising a son, Nandini asked him to milk her and drink that milk from a cup of leaves.

Dilipa said that he would wait for the calf to have its drink first and the sacrificial requirements of the hermitage to be met, before he took his drink, with the permission of the sage, his preceptor.

This pleased Nandini even more. She returned to the hermitage. The calf had his feed. Sacrificial offerings of milk and milk products were made. Only then did he have his drink of Nandini's milk.

Next morning, Dilipa made oblations in the fire, and respectfully went round it. He also performed circumambulations around Vashishttha and Arundhati, and Nandini and her calf. Then, with the blessings of Vashishttha, he mounted the chariot with Sudakshina, and returned to his capital.

The royal couple received an enthusiastic welcome, and soon Sudakshina became an expectant mother.

Canto III

Thin and pale and seized occasionally by the fancies of women who are carrying, Sudakshina had a son at the appropriate time under auspicious constellations. The preceptor came all the way from the hermitage to perform the birth rites. The delighted father named him 'Raghu', which is derived from a root that means 'to go'. For, he thought that his small son would go far in valour and wisdom.

After the ceremony of tonsure, Raghu – along with sons of ministers – was taught how to read and write and was initiated in due course into art and literature. He had worthy teachers and endeared himself to them.

His father taught him how to shoot missiles.

Raghu grew into manhood. His arms were long as the pole of the yoke. His chest was broad as the panel of a door. His shoulders were sturdy and his neck broad. After giving him a ceremonial haircut, his father initiated him into marriage with princesses who considered themselves lucky to have him.

King Dilipa had been feeling that he had borne the yoke of the kingdom long enough, all by himself. To make his burden lighter, he conferred upon Raghu the title Yuvaraja (heir-apparent to the throne).

He began a series of *ashvamedhayajna*s (horse-sacrifices), with Raghu appointed as the one to protect the sacrificial horse. (In the horse-sacrifice, a king would let loose a horse with a challenge prominently written on its forehead, asking any prince, lord or chief whose territory it passed, to arrest it if he so dared, and face the army following the horse in order to guard it. To let the horse pass unchallenged meant that the prince was accepting the superiority of the king whose horse it was, and agreeing to be a vassal. To take the horse captive meant accepting the challenge. If the prince who accepted the challenge lost, his kingdom would be attached to the king who had set the challenge, that is, was performing the horse-sacrifice. If and when the horse returned from its tour, the exercise would be considered complete, and the king would become some sort of an over-lord or emperor over territories annexed through the horse.)

Raghu, assisted by other princes, was so good at this that he performed ninety-nine sacrifices, one after the other, without hindrance. He became comparable to Shatakratu (Indra, king of gods, so named because, to conquer his enemies, he had performed *shata* or a hundred *kratu* or sacrificial ceremonies).

When the horse was let loose again for one last time, Indra – his form hidden – carried it away right in front of its armed guards. The band stood nonplussed and depressed, but just then Vashishttha's Nandini, roaming at will, happened to come there. With the holy drops from her body (urine), Raghu washed his eyes, and became blessed with extra-sensory perception.

And in the east, he saw Indra carrying away his horse. It was tethered to Indra's chariot and every now and then Matali, the charioteer, was trying to control it.

"You are the main recipient of sacrificial oblations," shrieked Raghu. "How is it that you are obstructing my father's sacrifice?"

Indra explained, "Those who treasure fame, guard it from their enemies. Your father seeks, through this sacrifice, to rob me of my worldwide fame, and so I seek to protect myself. By 'Shatakratu', the sages understand me. These titles do not belong to any second person. I am therefore carrying away this horse."

Raghu only laughed and struck Indra on the chest with an arrow. Indra too shot at Raghu's chest. There was a valiant rejoinder, forcing Indra to come out with his most potent weapon *kulisha* (*vajra*, thunderbolt). Raghu fell, but rose again, at which Indra declared, "None but you has ever withstood my weapons. I am pleased. Ask of me whatever you wish, except this horse."

Raghu put back his arrow in the quiver and said, "Then let my father have the entire fruits of the sacrifice, as if the ceremony was concluded. And arrange for my father to hear this entire account as he is sitting in his court, from your own messenger."

Not altogether satisfied, Raghu returned to the court. There his father, King Dilipa, already comforted by a messenger from Indra, greeted him and stroked his body, marked with Indra's

thunderbolt. He remained the performer of one-less-than-hundred sacrifices, and eventually withdrew himself from worldly affairs. The white umbrella that was the symbol of royal power, he made over to his young son, and retired with his queen to the shades of a hermitage.

Canto IV

Succeeding to his father's throne, Raghu brought all the enemy kings under his control. Temperate like the south wind, he won over the hearts of his subjects. Even women tending fields of rice and sugarcane made up ballads about him.

At the end of the rainy season, when the mud on the roads dried up, and rivers became easier to cross, Raghu start out on *digvijaya*, the conquest of the quarters.

As the passage of elephants is marked by trees broken, uprooted and robbed of their fruits, Raghu's march was marked by kings defeated, deposed and dispossessed of their kingdoms.

Proceeding east, Raghu erected victory towers in the delta region of the river Ganga. Marching along seashores and across rivers, over the mountains and forests of pepper, cardamom and sandalwood in the south, Raghu went on to conquer the western coasts. He then proceeded north, along the river Sindhu, across the Himalayas, right into the hilly north-east. Everywhere people bent before him like reeds before a river's force. Once they admitted Raghu's supremacy, they became vassal-kings deprived of their sovereignty, who paid him tributes of pearls, jewels, horses and elephants. All the four quarters conquered, the conqueror returned home with his vassals.

On his return, he performed the sacrificial ceremony *vishvajit* (world-conqueror), donating and distributing all the wealth won in course of the conquest.

Once the ceremony was over, the kings left for their kingdoms, which were now vassal-states, part of Raghu's empire.

Canto V

Just then Koutsa, a pupil of a great sage named Varatanu, came to seek Raghu's help in paying his preceptor his fees. King Raghu went forward to receive his guest and observe the rituals of hospitality. But after the recent *vishvajit* ceremony, there was no pot of gold left to put the offerings into. So Raghu had the offerings put in an earthen container.

Greeting Koutsa, Raghu inquired after the welfare of Varatanu and his hermitage. What could he do for his guest?

Koutsa admitted that his hopes had been dashed. He had hoped to ask Raghu for Varatanu's fees. But offerings in an earthen container had made it clear to him that Raghu was in no position to help him. The *vishvajit* ceremony had made him a poor man.

And the guest was about to leave.

But Raghu stopped him. How much was the fee?

Koutsa revealed that at first Varatanu had not asked any fees of Koutsa, but pressed again and again, he had got annoyed. He had lost his consideration for Koutsa's slender means and had asked for fourteen crores of gold coins.

Raghu requested Koutsa to be his guest a little longer. With all the wealth on earth exhausted, Raghu's intention now was to extract it from Kubera, the treasurer of gods, and lord of the mountain Kailasa. Raghu spent the night in his high-powered chariot, arrayed with weapons and was just about to start at dawn, when the guards of his treasury came to inform him that it had rained gold in the treasury!

Even before Raghu had advanced upon Kubera, he had received a shining heap of gold from Kubera. He insisted on giving all of it to Koutsa, although Koutsa wanted no more than what Varatanu had asked.

With camels and mares loaded with gold, Koutsa left for Varatanu's hermitage.

In due course, Raghu, the sovereign ruler of the world, had a son. As he was born in the Brahma-*muhurtha* (auspicious hour before dawn associated with Brahma, the unborn one who gave birth to the universe) and resembled Kumara (army-chief of gods, son of Shiva and Parvati), Raghu named him Aja (*a-ja*, one who is not born of men).

Aja grew up to resemble Raghu as the flame of a lamp lit from the flame of another. Bhoja, the young king of Vidarbha, sent a messenger inviting Aja to his sister Indumati's *swayamvara* (ceremony in which the bride publicly makes her own choice of bridegroom out of suitors assembled at her father's court). King Raghu thought an alliance with Bhoja was an honourable one, and sent Aja along with an army.

Once the army was camping on the banks of the Narmada, a wild elephant emerged from the waters, its breast covered with a tangle of moss and weeds. Ichor running from his temples intoxicated the elephants and horses in the army, who began to break though their tethers. Chariots got overturned.

Aja knew that it was not fit for a king to kill a wild elephant. So he hit the rushing elephant on the temple with an arrow, but only very lightly, just to turn him away.

To the amazement of all, the elephant instantly turned into a Gandharva (delicate creature of high altitudes, possessing superhuman powers) in pearls, who showered Aja with flowers. He explained that a sage had changed him into an elephant in order to punish him for his arrogance. When he had pleaded with the sage, he had received the assurance that he would regain his true form when Aja of Ikshvaku-vamsha would shoot at him.

The Gandharva now gifted Aja a special weapon, named Sammohana (Delusion), which instead of wounding men, created delusions among them. Then the two went their ways.

Canto VI

Next morning Aja went to the assembly of Indumati's suitors, sitting in splendid attire on ornamental platforms. As Aja went to his

seat, all attention turned to him, and the other princes lost hope of winning Indumati's favour.

Bards sang, incense burnt, and conch-shells sounded. Indumati came in, glowing with perfect beauty. She walked past the princes, rejecting each gracefully with a bow, and coming to a stop before Aja. As she garlanded Aja, his followers were joyous, the other princes gloomy. The assembly looked like a lake at dawn that had unfurled Padma (lotuses, opening to the sun) in one section, and folded-up Kumuda (water-lilies, opening to the moon) in another.

Canto VII

Three days after a gorgeous wedding, the newly-married couple started out from Vidarbha.

Meanwhile, the other princes had made a plan to rob Aja of Indumati and they stood blocking Aja's way at a juncture of the road. Putting Indumati under a trusted officer's care, Aja faced his enemies.

Even when his army began to scatter, he fought on. An entire host of men fell upon him with every kind of force, from elephants to arrows. Aja was forced to make use of the weapon Sammohana that he had received from the Gandharva.

The enemy was struck immediately to sleep. Men leant against their flagstaffs and went off to sleep, their hands powerless to draw the bowstring and shoot, their helmets falling off.

Aja blew the conch-shell. His soldiers returned.

As Aja showed his bride the scene. Indumati praised him shyly, and Aja then bore her off – like Vijayalakshmi, the goddess of victory herself, to his father.

King Raghu greeted his victorious son and transferred household responsibilities to him. Kings of the Solar dynasty do not cling to the household when there is one capable of bearing the yoke of the family.

Canto VIII

Almost the entire world had come under Raghu, and that he now made over to Aja. The learned sage Vashishttha performed the coronation rites.

It was usual for men of Dilipa's lineage to become bark-clad hermits in the final phase of their lives. But when Raghu started to leave for the forest, Aja fell at his feet, crown and all, praying that Raghu should not forsake him.

Raghu looked at his tear-stained face and granted him his wish. But he did not take back the charges he had relinquished.

He began to reside in a hermitage just outside the city, and the royal estate saw to his comforts, just as his daughter-in-law did.

With Aja managing state affairs and Raghu pursuing spiritual matters, the royal family was now like the sky when the sun rises and the moon sinks.

Out of regard for his son, Raghu passed some years in this fashion. Then through yoga, he composed his body into a samadhi, the final state of rest.

When Aja heard how his father had yielded up his body, he shed heavy tears. The sacred texts prohibit the funeral rituals of a householder in the case of a hermit or ascetic. So Aja did not cremate Raghu, but buried him in the fashion of an ascetic. But out of his filial devotion, he also performed the funeral rites due to a householder. The wise advised him not to grieve, and he resumed his duties as a king.

Soon Indumati presented him a son who was named Dasharatha (one with ten chariots).

One day, after looking into people's affairs, Aja was roaming the city gardens with Indumati. Narada was passing overhead with his lute. (Narada is a *devarishi* or deified sage, one of the ten mind-born sons of Brahma, a messenger between gods and men, endowed with power of free movement along aerial routes, and the inventor of the *veena*, a stringed musical instrument like the lute). At the top end of

the lute hung a wreath of celestial flowers, which smelt excessively sweet, more than any seasonal flower on the earth. The rushing wind, as if eager to smear itself with that scent, bore the wreath off.

The wreath came to rest upon the tips of Indumati's breasts. Indumati was dazed. She grew faint like moonlight robbed of the moon. She fell down lifeless, bringing her husband down with her. By fanning and other means, Aja was revived. But Indumati remained as she was.

Then Aja tenderly laid Indumati on his lap – her wonted place of rest. He cast aside his inborn fortitude, and began to lament in a voice choked with tears.

"If even flowers can kill by mere contact, everything can be a weapon of death. What a tender way of destroying life is this – like snowfall upon a lotus! Home-maker, counselor, friend, consort, and favourite pupil in forms of fine arts, what have I not been robbed of by merciless Death? I may have wealth and powers, but no happiness, now that you are gone." Aja lamented on and on.

Aja's kinsmen removed Indumati's body from his lap and cremated her with that wreath for adornment. Aja wanted to ascend the funeral pyre with her, but restrained himself. Performing the funeral ceremony, ten days after her death, he re-entered the city.

From the hermitage, his preceptor sent him a message.

"Indumati was really Harini, a dancer at the court of immortals. Indra had sent her to distract a sage named Trinabindu from his meditation. When Harini had tried, she had been cursed by the sage to a mortal existence. When Harini had pleaded that she had only been doing what she had been told, the sage had modified his curse. Harini would have to leave heaven and descend to earth, but the moment she caught sight of flowers from heaven, she would be freed from her curse. That is what happened."

The sage further advised Aja to stop brooding on Indumati, and instead consider himself wedded to the duties of a king.

But the words had no actual impact on Aja's heart. He carried on for eight years, which were relieved only by the sight of his child, who was the very picture of his wife, and by dreams. When he developed a fatal disease beyond the cure of physicians, in his hurry to go after his wife, he considered it his gain. Dasharatha had grown up a little. Aja decided to instruct him on statecraft, and then, starve himself to death. He renounced his body at the holy confluence of Ganga and Sarayu, and was united with his beloved wife once again in Nandana, the celestial pleasure-park.

Canto IX

Dasharatha, who was just old enough to get into armour, succeeded to the realm of Uttarakoshala. He developed into an able ruler.

By means of his bow and arrow, he extended the empire up to the sea. He became Indra's ally in the battlefield. He performed many sacrificial ceremonies.

Marrying the princesses of Kosala, Kekaya and Magadha, he enjoyed the festivities of spring. Then he felt an urge for the joys of hunting.

Dressed appropriately in armour the colour of leaves, armed with bow and arrows, and wreathed in wildflower, he entered the forest on horseback. The forest was teeming with deer, bisons, boars, rhinoceros, elephants, and lions. The king chased them and brought many of them down. Gradually he moved into an unknown part of the forest unattended by his soldiers. He spent the night on a bed of leaves and twigs. He woke up to birds singing and elephants flapping their ears. Following a stag till his horse began to foam at the mouth, he reached the river Tamasa, whose banks are haunts of ascetics.

From the river water there rose the loud and distinct sound of a pot being filled. On the apprehension that it was the trumpeting of an elephant, he discharged an arrow that could follow the sound.

Dasharatha thus violated the rule that forbids kings from killing elephants.

"Alas, father!" he heard the wail. Sadly, he sought to find its source hidden among the reeds on the bank, and was himself stricken xto the heart to come upon a child — an ascetic's son with a water-pot, struck by his arrow.

Alighting from the horse, the king propped up the child against the water-pot and asked him about his family. Falteringly, he told him that he was the son of a non-Brahmana ascetic. Urged by him, Dasharatha carried him to his blind parents, the arrow as yet un-plucked.

He then told them what he had unknowingly done to their only son. The lamenting couple caused the king to pull out the arrow from the breast of the child, who then died. His aged father took his tears in his hand and used them to curse the king. (Traditionally, one takes water in one's hand, utters the curse, and then throws it at the one being cursed.) "Like me, you too will die of grief for your son in your old age."

Dasharatha replied, "To me, who has not gazed upon the face of a son, even this curse comes with a blessing. What can this despicable one who deserves to die at your hands, do for you?" The ascetic then asked for wood for the funeral pyre by means of which he, with his wife, wanted to follow their son in death.

By then, the attendants had found Dasharatha and he immediately arranged for the ascetic's wishes to be fulfilled. The king then returned to the capital, the curse planted deep within his mind.

Canto X

Dasharatha ruled for long years and still did not have a son. Finally, a team of priests headed by Rishyashringa held a sacrificial ceremony for a son to be born. From the sacrificial fire there emerged a wonderful form carrying a golden bowl of *charu* (milk and rice). This represented the energies of Vishnu who had promised the *sura* (gods) that he would be born as Dasharatha's son in order to rescue creation from the atrocities of Ravana, the ten-headed *rakshasa* (*demon*).

The king had great respect for Kaushalya, while Kaikeyee was his darling. He divided the *charu* between them, wishing them to share it

with Sumitra. Each gave Sumitra half her portion. All three in due course became mothers. The first one to be born was Kaushalya's son, who was so winsome that he was named Rama (the pleasant one). Kaikeyee's son was named Bharata. Sumitra had twins, Lakshmana and Shatrughna. Although fraternal feelings were equal among them, Rama and Lakshmana affectionately formed a pair, as did Bharata and Shatrughna. The unity of the two pairs was never broken.

Canto XI

Even before Rama had shaved the locks of a child, the powerful sage named Kaushika (Vishvamitra) came to ask Dasharatha to allow Rama and Lakshmana to go with him to check the disturbance to sacrificial ceremonies that demons were causing in the forest. Dasharatha granted the sage's request.

The princes were used to crystal floors and chariots. But they bounded across the forest on foot, protected by charms the sage taught them.

At the twang of their bow-strings, the demoness Tadaka appeared, huge and dark, smeared with blood instead of sandalwood-paste, and wearing skulls for earrings.

She swooped on Rama with a terrible screech, but Rama struck her down with his shaft. Pleased, Kaushika taught Rama how to use a magic missile against demons.

At the hermitage, they found demons defiling the sacrificial altars by pouring blood from the sky. Tadaka's son was among them. Rama's shots got rid of these troublesome elements and the priests at the hermitage could carry the ceremony to a conclusion.

Kaushika took them along as he went on an invitation to King Janaka of Mithila, who was holding a sacrificial ceremony. The young princes were curious about the bow Janaka was said to have. It was very stiff and difficult to bend, and only the one who could string it would win Janaka's daughter.

They passed the hermitage of Gautama, whose wife Ahalya had been turned to stone. At the purifying touch of Rama's feet, she got back her own form.

Welcomed by Janaka and the citizens of Mithila, they attended the ceremony. Then Kaushika told Janaka about Rama's wish to take a look at the bow.

Janaka, looking at Rama's child-like form, felt sorry that he had set such a tough task as the condition of winning his daughter's hand.

But while the assembly gazed in wonder, Rama caught hold of the massive bow and bent it so as to stretch the string across. But drawn too far, the bow snapped with a harsh sound.

This valour was the price at which Janaka had declared he would give away his daughter Sita, who had emerged not out of any woman, but from the earth. Now he sent his household priest to Dasharatha and he came over with his other two sons. Rama, foremost in the line of Raghu, married Sita, the one born of the earth and brought up by Janaka. Lakshmana married Urmila, Janaka's own daughter. Bharata and Shatrughna married the daughters of Kushadhvaja, Janaka's younger brother.

Content at getting his sons married off, Dasharatha started out with them on the homeward journey.

But Rama's feat had proclaimed to Bhargava (Parashurama) that the Kshatra-caste was once again asserting itself. (Bhargava, literally, descendant of the great sage Bhrigu and therefore of the Brahmana caste, refers to another Rama, son of sage Jamadagni and Renuka, a princess and therefore of the Kshatra caste. To avenge the murder of his father by kings, that is, the Kshatra-caste, Bhargava had chopped off with his *parashu* or axe, the heads of countless kings, eradicating the Kshatra caste from the earth twenty-one times, and getting the name Parashu-Rama.)

He stopped the Raghavas as they were going home, and challenged Rama to bend his bow. Rama did so effortlessly. As a Raghava or Raghu's descendant, this is how he restored the lost glory of the Kshatras.

Then the bridegroom's party returned to Ayodhya, which was eagerly waiting to see the brides – the four princesses of Mithila.

Canto XII

Like the flame of the lamp at dawn, Dasharatha was in the final stage of life. Old age urged him to hand over his kingdom to Rama.

As the citizens adored Rama, they were thrilled. But Kaikeyee spoilt all that. She became angry as Chandi, the battle-goddess, and like a pair of snakes from their holes, brought out two boons the king had once promised to grant her.

One of them was Rama's exile for fourteen years, and the other was Bharata's accession to the throne. The order to go to the forest, Rama received cheerfully. So that his father would not deviate from the truth, that is, render false the promise to Kaikeyee of any two boons she asked for; he with Sita and Lakshmana for his companions, entered the forest Dandaka.

Dasharatha died, anguished at his loss. All this while Bharata had been away, staying with his mother's family. The ministers called him back to Ayodhya. But when he heard how his father had died, he not only hated his mother, but became averse to the throne as well. With his army, he followed Rama to the forest.

At Chitrakoota (forest-covered hill near Prayaga), Bharata met Rama and, informing him of Dasharatha's ascent to heaven, invited Rama to come back to the kingdom.

But Bharata found it impossible to persuade Rama to return. Bharata begged for Rama's sandals, so as to make them the presiding deities of the realm. Rama agreed and Bharata went back, but not as far as Ayodhya. Staying at the village Nandigrama, he managed the kingdom like a trust.

Rama, with his wife and his younger brother, survived on food gathered from the forest.

Soon Rama left Chitrakoota and traveled south, staying at hermitages on the way.

The demon named Viradha, dark as an evening cloud, tried to snatch Sita away, but Rama and Lakshmana killed him and buried him so that his stench would not defile the area.

On the advice of the sage Agastya, Ram stayed at Panchavati (grove of five fig-trees in the Dandaka forest, near the source of the river Godavari, about two miles from present Nashik, Maharashtra).

Ravana's sister Shurpanakha (one whose nails are like winnowing-baskets) turned up there, and as a snake approaches the sandalwood tree, approached Rama in the very presence of Sita, soliciting love in a voice sweet as the cuckoo's.

Rama and Lakshmana rejected her. She then approached Rama once again. Sita laughed, and that laughter disturbed Shurpanakha's calm. She assumed her true form, and began to howl like a jackal. Lakshmana, realizing that she was a demon, disfigured her face with his sword.

She rose into the sky, threatening dire consequences. Rushing to Janasthana, she told Khara, Dushana, and other demons about this insult. The demons came flocking in thousands. But Rama's arrows reduced them to sleep. Shurpanakha alone remained to carry the bad news to Ravana (at Lanka).

Ravana felt as though Rama had brought all ten of his heads under his feet. Through a demon who had assumed the form of a deer, he deceived Rama and Lakshmana and carried Sita away. The king of birds, a mythical vulture named Jatayu who had a debt of affection to Dasharatha, tried to check his way, but could do so only for a short while. Ravana slashed off his wings. Rama and Lakshmana, hunting for Sita, came upon the maimed bird, who informed them about Ravana's abduction of Sita. The brothers cremated their father's friend.

Rama developed friendly relations with a displaced chief of the monkeys, Sugreeva. Under his instructions, monkeys sped everywhere, searching for Sita. On meeting Sampati (Jatayu's elder brother), they got news of Sita's whereabouts, and Maruti (super-ape Hanuman, son of wind-god Marut) crossed over the sea to Lanka. Searching through Lanka, he came upon Sita surrounded and guarded by *rakshasi*s (womenfolk of the demons).

Maruti gave her a ring of Rama's and she welcomed that token with tears of joy. Cheering her up, and causing havoc among the

demons, Maruti set fire to the city before taking his leap back across the sea. Enraptured at getting a gem that Sita had sent as a token through Maruti, Rama thought nothing of the sea, and started out with troops of monkeys.

While Rama was camping on the seashore, Vibheeshana (Ravana's younger brother) came and met him. Rama made him the promise of turning the kingdom over to him.

Rama made the monkeys construct a bridge over the sea. Using that bridge to cross over to Lanka, Rama besieged the golden city. Monkeys and demons met in battle. Rama and Lakshmana got bound and entangled by a magical weapon from Meghanada (one who roared like a cloud, son of Ravana, versed in magic). But Garuda (celestial bird that carries Vishnu) cut through the bonds and freed them.

Ravana pierced Lakshmana's breast with a powerful spear, and Rama, though he was unhurt, felt his own heart break. But Maruti fetched him healing herbs and soon Lakshmana was up again, making the women of Lanka lament for their dead, and finishing Meghanada off.

Rama himself killed Kumbhakarna (one who had ears like pots, brother of Ravana's, who was very fond of sleeping). Other demons too fell, among countless monkeys. Ravana then came out of his palace again, determined that today the world would lose either Rama or Ravana.

Rama was on foot. But now Indra sent him a celestial chariot driven by his own charioteer Matali, who invested Rama with celestial armour.

Ravana was no longer his former self. But Ravana had defeated many deities, lifted up the mountain Kailasa, and was a great devotee of Shiva. Rama held his foe in great esteem.

Missile for missile, each warrior matched his opponent, till Rama took up Brahmastra (a supreme magical weapon named after Brahma). As he shot it to the chanting of a spell, it split into countless parts with flaming points, and brought down, painlessly and instantly, the row of heads that Ravana possessed.

Relieved as well as marveling, the gods rained down flowers upon Rama. Matali returned to Indra with the divine chariot. Rama, the chief of Raghu's line, took back his wife, purified in fire. He merged Ravana's property into Vibheeshana's, and followed by Lakshmana, Sugreeva and Vibheeshana, started off for Ayodhya on Ravana's (originally Kubera's) wonderful aerial conveyance, Pushpaka (made of flowers).

Canto XIII

Along the route of birds, clouds and celestial creatures, sped the aircraft Pushpaka.

After crossing the sea and the curving beach, Rama pointed out to Sita that, below them, the hermits of Janasthana were rebuilding their hermitages, reassured that the demons would not bother them any more. He showed her the spot where he had found the anklet she had dropped while being carried away. As they flew over Panchavati, Rama pointed out the mango sapling Sita had watered there, and the clump of reeds whose privacy they, as a couple, had often resorted to. When they could see the river Sarayu, Rama pointed out to Sita that members of the Ikshvaku family, when they conclude horse-sacrifices, always take a holy dip in the Sarayu.

Rama saw before him dust rising from the earth. He said:

"I think Bharata has heard the news of my arrival from Maruti (Hanumana), and is coming with his army to greet me. There he is, in hermit's rags, and on foot."

The Pushpaka, sensing Rama's wish, glided down, watched in wonder by the people accompanying Bharata. Coming down its crystal steps, Rama, tears welling up in his eyes, kissed the head that had refused the crown. He inquired about the welfare of the ministers and introduced Vibheeshana and Sugreeva to all. Bharata embraced Lakshmana and touched Sita's feet. The monkeys mounted royal elephants, while Vibheeshana and Sugreeva mounted royal chariots. Then in a splendid, slow procession headed by Rama in the Pushpaka, all of them reached the wooded spot where Shatrughna had pitched the tents.

Canto XIV

Rama and Lakshmana found their mothers Kaushalya and Sumitra much changed, like creepers bereft of the tree supporting them. The mothers were pained at the marks of weapons on their sons, but proud to be called the 'mother of war-heroes'.

The old ministers completed the coronation of Rama. Water from several hallowed sources – lakes, seas and rivers – were poured on Rama's head out of golden pots.

Rama then entered Ayodhya, where gateways had been erected in his honour and people sprinkled him with puffed rice. Bharata held the royal umbrella over Rama. Lakshmana and Shatrughna fanned him. With misty eyes, he entered the palace where all that remained of his father was his portrait.

Rewarding his allies in battle, rehabilitating old associates, returning the Pushpaka to Kubera, this heroic member of the Raghu-dynasty now took over governance of the kingdom.

He paid equal attention to matters of righteousness, economics and pleasure (*dharma*, *artha* and *kama*) Taking care of state affairs at appropriate hours, he also spent time with his lovely wife. As they enjoyed themselves in luxurious suites full of frescoes, the hardships they had gone through in the Dandaka forest became pleasant memories to dwell upon. In course of time, Sita grew thin and pale as a reed and her nipples changed colour. Realizing that she was with child, her delighted husband seated her on his lap and asked her if there was anything she longed for.

Sita wanted to visit the forests along the Bhagirathi (Ganga), where the Kusha grass grows, wild animals eat up the Neevara rice of sages, and girls of the hermitage roam about in groups. Rama promised her what she wanted.

Then he climbed to the top of his tall palace to look upon the city below, the prosperous market along the highway, the boats on the river Sarayu, and the couples in the pleasure-gardens at the town outskirts.

This sight filled him with satisfaction and he turned to a spy of his, Bhadra by name, and asked him what people said of him.

"O lord of men! The citizens praise all you have done, except for taking the queen back even when she had dwelt in the palace of the demons."

This terrible slander shattered Rama's heart like a hammer breaking hot iron. Finally, he decided that there was no other way to stop this slander, except for abandoning Sita. Those for whom reputation is wealth, prize it above life or life's pleasures.

Sadly but firmly, he told his brothers of the slander and his decision. He made it clear that it was for the sake of the reputation of their family. "I personally know Sita is innocent. But I cannot bear this slander, and to get rid of it, I will leave my wife – with child though she is – just as I had left the kingdom at my father's command."

He explained to the brothers that this would not render futile all his struggles, culminating in killing of Ravana. That had been for the purpose of redressing a wrong.

When Rama, so harsh in his intention towards Sita, spoke thus, none of the brothers could either stop him or support him. Rama gave some instructions to Lakshmana in private, and Lakshmana accepted them unquestioningly.

It was he who transported the unsuspecting Sita to the wooded banks of Ganga.

The kind sage Valmiki, whose hermitage was nearby, heard her lament. He gave her shelter.

Lakshmana reported to Rama that his order had been executed. Suppressing his grief, Rama gave the kingdom his single-minded devotion. He took no second wife and at sacrificial ceremonies, used nothing but an image of Sita's.

Canto XV

Troubled by the demon Lavana, hermits dwelling beside the river Yamuna (Kalindi) resorted to Rama. Rama assigned the task to Shatrughna. Shatrughna stopped at Valmiki's hermitage to rest his horses, and that very night, twin sons were born to Sita. Shatrughna was pleased to get the news, before he resumed his journey next morning.

Lavana was a nephew of Ravana's and gave a tough fight to Shatrughna. But Shatrughna succeeded in killing him, proving himself a worthy brother of Rama and Lakshmana. Shatrughna stayed there for some time, building himself a palace, and developing the city of Madhura (present Mathura) on the Yamuna.

With respect to Sita's twins, Valmiki saw to the rites customary after birth and in childhood. When they had been born, he had cleaned their wet bodies with Kusha, a species of grass, and Lava, wool or hair from a cow's tail. So he named them Kusha and Lava. As they grew up, Valmiki taught them the sacred texts, as well as songs of his own composition. When they sang Rama's sweet story before her, Sita found the pain of separation from Rama relieved a little.

The other three descendents of Raghu's dynasty, Bharata, Lakshmana and Shatrughna, also had two sons each. Shatrughna made over Madhura to son Shatrughatin, and Vidisha to son Subahu. He returned to Ayodhya, bypassing Valmiki's hermitage and not even reporting the birth of his sons to Rama.

Now there came to the palace a father carrying his young son's body, and lamenting: "The conditions of subjects has deteriorated under Rama's rule. Earlier, there were no untimely deaths."

Rama re-called the aircraft Pushpaka to himself. He flew across his kingdom and found a Shudra, Shambuka, hanging upside down from a tree over a smoking fire. This practice of austerities was a transgression of the established order of society, because as a class, the Shudras were only to do menial jobs. Rama set the matter right by decapitating Shambuka. In Ayodhya, the Brahmana's son came alive.

Rama, who had earlier let loose the horse for Ashvamedha-sacrifice, now performed its ceremony most scrupulously. Demons, usually the ones to disturb a sacrifice, themselves guarded over it.

Rama sat in the great ancestral hall, commendably with no wife other than a gold image of Sita.

Before the assembly of guests, Kusha and Lava, encouraged by Valmiki, sang the Ramayana. Their sweet voices and their physical resemblance to Rama drew attention.

"Who taught you? Who wrote these lines?" Rama asked and the lads pointed at Valmiki.

Rama went to the sage and offered him his kingdom. Valmiki, introducing him to his sons, asked only for his acceptance of Sita.

"O father!" said Rama, "This daughter of yours has been purified in our very presence. But the subjects have no faith. Let Sita convince my subjects of the purity of her character, and I will accept her, along with her sons."

Once the king had made this promise, a happy Valmiki got his disciples to fetch Sita from the hermitage.

The next day, Rama arranged a gathering of the citizens for the demonstration. Sita came, clad in a rough cloth dyed red, eyes fixed on her own feet.

Her very appearance bespoke her innocence. But still the people withdrew their eyes from her path, and stood with faces averted. Valmiki asked her to remove any doubts the people had. Taking a sip of the water Valmiki's disciples had brought from the Ganga flowing beside the hermitage, Sita spoke:

"O Goddess Earth! As there has been no disloyalty towards my husband, in word, mind or action, so you should take me within yourself."

Through a hole in the ground there at once rose the splendid form of Vasundhara, the goddess of the earth. She took Sita – whose

eyes were on her husband's face – underground, even while Rama was exclaiming, "No, no!"

Rama took up his bow to make the earth yield Sita up, but was calmed down. The ceremony over, Rama made offerings to sages.

On the advice of Yudhajit, Bharata's maternal uncle and ruler of the kingdom of Kekaya, Rama gave Bharata the country named Sindhu, which was adjacent to Kekaya. When Gandharvas (creatures of higher altitudes, expert musicians), attacked Sindhu, Bharata made them yield their weapons and stick to musical instruments alone. He returned to Rama, making sons Taksha and Pushkala the rulers of capitals named after them (Takshasheela or Taxila near present Rawalpindi, Pakistan, and Pushkalavati or Pu-se-kia-lo-fa-ti near Peshawar).

Lakshmana appointed his sons Angada and Chandraketu the rulers of Karapatha (Angada at Angadapuri, the present Angadapur or Sahabad in Oudh, and Chandraketu in Chandrakanta, present Chandapur near Saharanur, U.P.)

Rama and his brothers now performed funeral rites for their mothers.

As advised by a hermit (actually the god of death, in disguise), Rama had made a rule that he would throw out whoever it was that disturbed him when he was in a private conference. The sage Durvasa (ill-reputed for his bad temper and habit of cursing) arrived, and wanted to see Rama. Lakshmana, who was on guard, feared Durvasa's curse and disturbed Rama, who was then having just such a private conference. But Lakshmana knew that he had broken the rule and went at once to the Sarayu and yielded up his life by means of yoga. Thus he saw to the keeping of his elder brother's vow.

Lakshmana had been a fourth part of Rama's own self. When he preceeded Rama to heaven, Rama became enfeebled.

Kusha had grown up to be a goad unto his foes. Lava could reduce people to tears by his words of wisdom. Rama established Kusha in Kushavati and Lava in Sharavati (south and north of

Koshala). With a steady mind, he now left Ayodhya, along with his brothers, and proceeded to Sarayu, where he ascended to heaven on a celestial chariot.

The devoted people of Ayodhya, towards whom Rama had been so considerate, left their houses and followed him. Monkeys and demons also followed. The place where they plunged into the river, like cows (*go*) crossing (*pratara*) the river in a herd, keeping close to one another, became a holy spot known as Gopratara. Rama created a special heaven for those who had been his subjects. Sugreeva and other monkeys, who had been born of gods, went back to their original forms. Rama himself re-entered his own form, that of Vishnu.

Canto XVI

As was the family tradition, the other seven descendents of Raghu were always respectful towards Kusha. They did a lot of useful work for people, like building bridges, taming tuskers, and cultivation, and became extremely prosperous. But they never trespassed upon the territories of one another, like the various oceans never transgress their shoreline.

Once at Kushavati, when the lamps were burning low, and people were asleep, Kusha saw in his bed-chamber a woman dressed in the fashion of wives whose husbands are away, that is, in shabby clothes and without ornament or hair-do.

"How did you come through doors that are barred, and why?" asked the surprised king. "Descendents of Raghu are averse to wives of other men."

The woman explained, "I am the presiding deity of Ayodhya, the capital of your ancestors, in the condition of a woman deserted by her husband."

The turrets and ramparts of Ayodhya are shattered. The highways are haunts of jackals. Wild buffaloes sport in the pools, tigers climb the stairways. Pet peacocks have gone wild. Snakes crawl about. Gardens are overgrown with creepers. White-washed mansions have turned grey and at night, there are no lamps at the latticed windows.

This picture of the once-glorious capital persuaded Kusha to march back to Ayodhya, handing Kushavati over to learned Brahmanas.

He appointed able groups of artisans to do renovation work at Ayodhya. While entering, he performed rites of Vastu (worship of the building, constructed or renovated according to certain principles), as well as animal-sacrifices for which Raghu's dynasty had been famous.

With stores well-stocked, horses stabled and elephants tethered, Ayodhya began to look like a young girl in ornaments. With the old capital restored to former splendour, Kusha was content.

Summer came, and struck by a fancy, Kusha sported in the waters of Sarayu with women who sprinkled him with coloured water out of golden containers.

He sported like a wild elephant and an amulet of his fell into the water without his being aware. It was a very special possession, a victory charm, presented by Rama who had received it from the sage Agastya.

After his desire for water-sport had been satisfied, Kusha got out of the river and saw his arm bereft of its celestial amulet.

He quickly summoned expert fishermen to drag the river.

Shamefacedly, they came back empty-handed, reporting that Kumuda (water-lily), a serpent dwelling in an underground pool of the river, had stolen it out of greed.

Kusha took up a powerful missile over which presided Garuda (the mythical eagle that carried Vishnu about and was a killer of serpents). But he kept it aside when immediately, out of the turbulent waters, there appeared the serpent-king Kumuda.

Bowing and presenting a beautiful girl to Kusha along with the amulet, he said: "This is my sister Kumudvati. While playing ball in the water, she had seen your amulet fall and caught it. Now she wishes to atone for her sin by serving you. Take her, along with the amulet, such a fit ornament for your strong arms."

In the presence of serpents, as well the sacred fire, Kusha accepted serpent-girl Kumudvati for his wife. The serpent-king felt reassured against Garuda and people of Ayodhya felt reassured from serpents.

Canto XVII

Soon Kumudvati had a son named Atithi. Kusha made him grasp politics and economics and then the hands of princesses.

Indra, troubled by the demon Durjaya, called for Kusha's assistance, and he went, instructing his ministers that Atithi was to be the king after him. (Kusha did have other wives, and there may have been other claimants to the throne.)

Kusha fought and killed the demon Durjaya, but was himself killed by him. Kumudvati followed him in death. By Kusha's last instructions, Atithi was installed on the throne.

Counseled by his ministers, he ruled fairly and justly over the realm to which his father had brought prosperity.

Like his forefathers, he performed the horse-sacrifice, and made such generous donations that, like Kubera, he came to be called '*Dhanada*', the donor of wealth.

Gods were benign to him. Indra sent him rain, Yama checked epidemics, Varuna made waterways safe, and Kubera augmented his wealth.

Canto XVIII

Atithi's queen was the daughter of Arthapati, the king of Naishadha (an area which gets its name from the mountain Nishadha in northern India). Through her, Atithi had a son as tall and strong as the mountain Nishadha, after which he was named.

As he grew up, Atithi felt happy at the prospect of his subjects having an able ruler. Carrying on with the duties of a king, as well enjoying the pleasures of royal living, Atithi eventually made son Nishadha the king, and ascended to the heaven he had earned by his deeds – pure and shining like the lily his mother (Kumudvati) had been named after.

Nishadha, the grandson of Kusha, had long arms that protected his large empire like the bars of the city-gate.

After him reigned his son Nala (reed-pipe), who pounded enemies like the elephant pounds a clump of reeds. In his old age, he sought the company of the forest-deer, making son Nabhas (sky) the king.

Nabhas was dark-complexioned like the sky and people loved him. After him, the throne went to his son Pundarika, chief among men like the elephant Pundarika is among celestial elephants guarding the four quarters.

When he in his old age resorted to the forest, his son Ksemadhanva became king. At the end of his long and peaceful reign, it was the turn of his son Devaneeka.

Devaneeka's son was Aheenagu (not mean or lowly), who, even though young, did not associate with any mean or lowly character.

His son and successor was Pariyatra (name of a tall mountain), who held his head higher than the mountain after which he was named.

After making the kingdom over to his son Shila, who had a broad chest like a slab of stone (*shila*) but was a modest, self-controlled person, Pariyatra abandoned himself to pleasures that he had denied himself while looking after the kingdom. But old age claimed him before he could satisfy himself.

His son, named Unnabha (one with a raised navel) although he had a deep navel, was the next king. The next one was Vajranabha (one with thunder in the navel), who had a thunderous battle-cry.

Shankhana (one who sounded the conch-shell), his son and the next king, extracted gems from mines.

His son Vyushitashva (one who assembled horses) assembled soldiers and horses upon the beaches, that is, guarded the empire that stretched up to the sea. He named his son Vishva-saha after

Vishveshwara (Vishva-ishvara or Shiva), whom he had propitiated in order to get his son.

After a long rule, Vishvasaha installed his son Hiranyanabha (one with a golden navel) upon the throne and departed for the forest. Hiranyanabha performed sacrificial ceremonies where herbal drinks were provided and was a credit to the ancient family-line.

His son was Kausalya (Uttarakosala was the family's old territory), and his son, Brahmishttha. Kausalya handed over the power to Brahmishttha, and himself merged with Brahma. Brahmishttha yielded up his life by bathing in a hallowed place of pilgrimage.

His son Putra (son), who was most respectful to elders, became the king and had a son Pushya, so-named because he was born under the auspicious constellation Pushya. Timid by birth, Pushya learnt yoga from Jaimini (famous sage, founder of the Mimansa school of philosophy), and freed himself from life's bondage.

Then his son Dhruva-sandhi took over and made pacts (*sandhi*) with the enemies, which were long-lasting and steady like the pole star Dhruva. He was a lion among men but, out on a hunt, he was killed by a lion, when his son Sudarshana was still a child.

Sudarshana was the single thread by which the family was hanging. The ministers, observing the hapless condition of the subjects, installed him with full rites upon the throne. The family of Raghu now had a child as the king.

With time, Sudarshana (good-looking) developed into a good-looking young man. The ministers wanted him to have sons of purity, and sent out messengers for portraits of beautiful princesses. When married to Sudarshana, they turned out to be even more beautiful than in their portraits.

Canto XIX

When old, Sudarshana retired to the forest Naimisha (sacred forest, abode of many sages), installing his fiery son Agnivarna (fiery, flame-coloured) on the throne.

Sudarshana, a true descendent of Raghu, had no problems in forgetting the luxuries of royal living. Agnivarna too had no problems in being the king. For, he only had to keep what he had got. Sudarshana had extended his empire and administered it well — as if envisaging Agnivarna only to enjoy it and not embellish it further.

For some years, Agnivarna discharged his royal duties himself. Gradually he reposed them in his ministers and devoted his youth to pleasure.

He was always with women and could not stay a moment without sporting with them. He neglected his queens, who had to think of ways to enticing him to their rooms. His interest was in dancing-girls and even servant-maids.

The flame of his desire burnt stronger and stronger. He amused himself with wine and women throughout the year, in every possible season. He was averse to any other duties.

When the subjects clamoured to see him, he put out a foot through the latticed windows of the palace for them to make their obeisance to.

In spite of his intoxicated state, his power and influence were such that other kings did not dare to attack him. But disease born of addiction to pleasure did attack him.

He grew pale-faced and so thin that he could keep only a few ornaments on his body. He could walk only with support and speak only in a faint voice. Galloping tuberculosis reduced him to the pathetic state of the libidinous.

With the king suffering from consumption, the dynasty appeared like the sky where only the last slice of the moon remained, the pool in summer where only slime was left, and the lamp-stand where the flame had reduced to dwarf-size.

His ministers got together and consulted with the priest of the royal family, who was well-versed in funeral rites. On the pretext of a ceremony to cure his disease, they secretly placed him on the blazing funeral pyre in the palace garden itself.

They quickly held meetings with prominent leaders of the people and, when they saw that a wife of Agnivarna's was clearly showing the auspicious signs of carrying a child, they entrusted the royal office to her.

The queen, seated on the golden throne, ruled Agnivarna's kingdom with the help of old and experienced ministers.

The Raghuvamsha ends here.

This is a rather abrupt ending, without any epilogue or concluding lines (especially since there was a prologue or introduction). Indeed, some consider the work to be incomplete. There are others who consider the last two cantos to be later additions.

But there is no lack of poetry in the way the decline of Raghu's dynasty is described. The first hints of decline are in 'Rama-rajya' (Rama's reign) itself. There had been no whisper of a scandal before, no untimely death either. Kusha's reign begins with Ayodhya in ruins. Although Kusha returns and does restoration, he reveals himself to be too fond of sporting with women than we would expect a son of Rama and Sita and a pupil of Valmiki's to be. He takes for his wife a princess of the serpents, a cut lower than previous queens like Sudakshina or Indumati (a celestial nymph), not to speak of Sita (of divine origin). Also, he gets killed by the demon he is called upon to kill; none of the dynasty had ever ended that way. There is no ostensible decline after that. The dynasty retains its power. But the numerous kings who are mentioned now just about keep up the standards. There is no remarkable feat, no spectacular achievement to take the dynasty to new heights. Clearly, there is a leveling-off in performance, which suddenly sinks to abysmal depths with the debauch Agnivarna, the last of the Raghavas.

The end is poignant, but not without a note of hope. As an expecting mother sits on the throne, Raghu's family-line still has a chance of continuation.

It has continued, if not in terms of blood, then in terms of ideals cherished by future dynasties of Rajasthan, and perhaps every Indian family.

Glossary

Aditya	name of twelve sun-gods taken collectively
Agastya	powerful sage
Agnivarna	the last Solar king mentioned here
Aguru	fragrant aloe wood
Ahalya	wife of sage Gautama
Airavata	mythical elephant of Lord Indra; also name of elephant presiding over the eastern direction
Aja	Raghu's son, Indumati's husband
Akashaganga	river Ganga, conceived as flowing through the sky
Akhandala	Indra
Aksha	tree from whose berries rosaries are made, also called Nameru
Alaka	mythical city on Mount Kailasa
Ali	female companion or friend of a woman; way of addressing her
Amra	mango
Ananga	Madana, the god of love, rendered bodiless (*an-anga*) by an angry Shiva
Angiras	sage who composed many hymns

Anjana	eye-liner made out of lamp-black, collyrium, also called *kajjala*
Anjana-shalaka	stick of eye-liner or collyrium
Aparna	Parvati, who ate not even a leaf (*parna*) while practicing austerities for Shiva
Apsara	mythical dancing-girls serving Indra, king of gods, in heaven
Ardhendumoli	Shiva
Arundhati	wife of sage Vashishttha, the morning star personified as the loyal wife of sage Vashishttha
Ashadha	the first month of monsoon
Ashirvachana	words of blessing, greetings
Ashoka	tree with dark leaves and bunches of red flowers
Ashvamedha-yajna	horse-sacrifice, where a king would let lose a horse as a challenge
Ashvamukha	superhuman species with faces like horses who lived in the Himalayas
Asura	superhuman species hostile to *sura* or gods
Athithi	Rama's grandson, king after Kusha
Avanti	name of a country north of the river Narmada and forming the eastern part of Malava
Ayodhya	ancient capital of Solar kings; later called Avadh (Oudh), now in Uttar Pradesh; on river Sarayu

Bakula	a kind of tree which poets imagined would blossom only when sprinkled with mouthfuls of wine by young women
Balaka	species of crane, flamingo
Bali	powerful demon oppressing the gods
Bhadra	Rama's spy
Bhagirathi	river Ganga
Bharata	one of Rama's brothers
Bhargava	Parashurama, descended from the great sage Bhrigu
Bhavani	Shiva's consort, Gauri, Parvati
Bhoja	king of Vidarbha
Bhrigu	name of an ancient sage regarded as the ancestor of the family of Bhrigus, called Bhargavas
Bhurja	the birch tree
Bimba	a fruit, ripe, red and rounded, often compared by poets to women's lips
Brahma	the Creator of the universe, himself *a-ja* or unborn, one of the three most important Hindu gods
Brahmacharya	first stage of life when one is an abstemious student
Brahmamuhurtha	auspicious hour before dawn associated with Brahma

Brahmana	highest caste, specializing in scholarly and holy pursuits
Brahmastra	potent missile associated with Brahma
Brahmavarta	ancient country north-west of Hastinapur and contiguous to Kurukshetra, between rivers Sarasvati and Drishadvati
Brihaspati	preceptor of the gods, personification of the planet Jupiter
Chakravaka	the ruddy goose, usually in a pair
Chamara	a fan or whisk made out of the hair of *chamari* cattle or yak
Chamari	female of a yak, whose tails are used to make whisks used to fan divinity and royalty
Chandi	goddess of war, form of Durga or Parvati, an epithet of angry, impassioned women
Chandikeshwara	Shiva
Chandra	Moon-god
Chandrahasa	Ravana's sword
Chandrakanta	moonstone, region probably near present Saharanpur, Uttar Pradesh, to which Lakshmana assigned his son Chandraketu
Charmanvati	river in Chambal area
Charu	oblation of cereals boiled in milk
Chataka	the name of a bird supposed to survive on rainwater directly from the cloud, even before it falls to the ground

Chhandas	poetic metre or rhythm
Chitrakoota	name of hill or district near Prayaga in Uttar Pradesh
Chuta	mango tree, whose blossoms appear in spring and imagined to be Madana's flowery arrows
Daksha	one of Brahma's sons, father of several daughters, including Sati
Dandaka	vast uninhabited region between the rivers Narmada and Godavari, now in Madhya Pradesh
Dashamukha	Ravana
Dashapura	name of a city, the capital of King Rantideva, possibly modern Dasor in Mandasor
Dasharatha	ruler in the dynasty of Raghu, Aja's son and Rama's father
Dasharna	a region with ten forts, Chhattisgarh
Devadaru	species of pine tree
Devagiri	region where there is a famous temple to Kartikeya, possibly modern Devgarh near Jhansi
Devarshi	epithet of sage raised to status of a divinity, like Narada
Dhanada	Kubera
Dhanapati	Kubera

Dharma-artha-kama	three of the four objectives of life, righteous conduct, material wealth, and physical desire, respectively; the fourth objective is *moksha* or spiritual elevation
Dheerodatta	patient and noble, as an epic hero was required to be
Dhruva	Pole star, symbol of constancy
Dhyana	meditation, as distinct from ritualistic worship with offerings
Digvijaya	conquest of the four quarters, empire-building
Dilipa	powerful king of the Solar dynasty and father of Raghu
Dinakara	Surya, the Sun-god
Dingnaga	mythical elephants guarding the various directions
Dohada	longings of a pregnant woman, which flowering trees are also supposed to have; rituals to take care of such longings
Doota	bearer of a message
Durjaya	demon
Durva	species of grass considered sacred and of fered to gods
Durvasa	sage notorious for flying into rages and dealing out curses
Gajasura	*asura* or demon in the form of *gaja* or elephant

Gambhira	a small river in Malwa
Gana	a semi-divine species who are Shiva's attendants
Gandhamadana	that which has intoxicating smell; name of a particular mountain to the east of Meru renowned for its fragrant forests of medicinal plants
Gandharva	mythical creature associated with music and dance, belonging to high altitudes
Gandhavati	a small stream near Ujjain, a tributary of the Sipra
Ganga	sacred river originating in the Himalayas and flowing into the Bay of Bengal; associated with various myths and legends; conceived to have three sections, flowing respectively across heaven, earth and the netherworld.
Garuda	mythical predatory bird, ruler of all winged creatures, killer of all serpents and Vishnu's carrier
Gautama	great sage who turned his wife Ahalya into stone
Giriraja	king of mountains, epithet of the Himalayas
Gopratara	spot where Rama died, pilgrimage
Gorochana	bright yellow pigment prepared from cow's urine or bile
Gauri	the fair one, Shiva's wife, Daksha's daughter who immolated herself
Gaurishikhara	peak (*shikhara*) of the Himalayas named after Gauri

Haima	golden
Halabhrit	Balaram, the carrier of the plough
Hara	Shiva
Hari	Vishnu, one of the three most important Hindu gods
Harini	celestial nymph
Haritala	yellow orpiment
Himalaya	famous mountain range to the north of India
Hutavaha	Agni, the fire-god
Ikshvaku	son of Manu Vaivasvata and founder-king of Raghu's dynasty
Indra	king of gods, Maghavan, Akhandala, Vasava
Indrajit	Meghanada, son of Ravana
Indranila	sapphire
Indumati	wife of Aja, human form of nymph Harini
Jaimini	sage-philosopher
Jambu	jamun, big tree with purple berries
Janaka	pious king of Mithila who brought Sita up
Janaki	King Janaka's daughter, Sita
Janasthana	part of the forest Dandaka
Jatayu	mythical vulture – friend of Dasharatha

Kadali	plantain or banana
Kadamba	tree blossoming in the rains, with big round yellow-and-white blossoms, Nipa
Kaikeyee	princess of Kekaya, wife of Dasharatha, and mother of Bharata
Kailasa	mountain of the Himalayan range, residence of Kubera
Kakubha	flower
Kakutstha	epithet of kings of the Solar dynasty who were descended from Kakudstha
Kala	one of sixteen slices or portions into which the moon is divided; an art or skill of which there are sixty-four (4 times sixteen)
Kali	dark goddess of great power, form of Durga or Chandi
Kalidasa	servant of goddess Kali; name of world-acclaimed Sanskrit poet
Kalindi	river Yamuna which descends from the mountain Kalinda
Kalpadruma	mythical tree (*druma*) yielding as many fruits as one can desire (*kalpa*)
Kalpataru	mythical tree (*taru*) bearing as many fruits as one can wish (*kalpa*)
Kalpavriksha	as above, *vriksha, taru* and *druma* all referring to tree
Kamadeva	Madana, god of love
Kamala	princess whom Kalidasa married

Kanaka	gold
Kanakhala	a holy place near Hardwar
Kandali	small plant of the monsoon
Karnikara	bright flower, without any fragrance
Kartikeya	Shiva's son, general of the gods
Kasha	tall, sharp-edged grass which grow white plumes or tassels in autumn
Kaurava	members of the Kuru family
Kaushalya	eldest wife of Dasharatha and mother of Rama
Kaushika	epithet of sage Vishvamitra
Kavya	literary piece
Kekaya	ancient kingdom
Kesara	tree with small, white, fragrant blossom, the Bakula
Ketaka	flowering shrub associated with monsoon
Khadga	curve-edged sword
Khandakavya	short literary piece, lyrical poetry as contrasted with epic poetry
Kichaka	a kind of bamboo
Kimnara	mythical creatures of high altitudes with beautiful singing voices
Kimpurusha	another name of Kimnara

Kos(sh)ala	ancient kingdom of Solar dynasty, beside the river Sarayu, with Ayodhya as capital
Koutsa	disciple of sage Varatanu
Kratu	sacrificial ceremony
Krishnasara	spotted antelope
Krouncha	name of a fissure in the Himalayas supposedly leading to the lake Manasa
Kshatriya	warriors, one of the four important castes
Kshetra	field, region
Kshiroda	mythical sea of milk, foaming-white
Kubera	treasurer of gods residing in Kailasa, Dhanapati
Kumara	literally, the son or, the young one; army-chief of gods, son of Shiva and Parvati
Kumarasambhava	name of Sanskrit epic by Kalidasa, literally, the birth of Kumara
Kumbhakarna	gigantic Rakshasha fond of sleeping, brother of Ravana
Kumuda	water-lily; name of a serpent-king
Kumudvati	water-lily plant; name of a serpent-princess
Kunda	shrub with small, white flower that blossoms at night and falls off at dawn
Kuravaka	flower, the amaranth
Kuru	country or ruler of country in the north of India, king of the Lunar dynasty

Kusha	grass considered holy and offered in religious ceremonies; elder of twin sons of Sita and cleaned on birth by Kusha grass
Kushadhvaja	younger brother of King Janaka of Mithila
Kushavati	region south of Koshala, under Kusha's rule
Lakshmana	Rama's devoted brother
Lakshmi	volatile goddess of wealth and prosperity
Lanka	island-capital of Rakshas
Lava	hair of cow's tail; younger of Sita's twins, so named because cleaned at birth by the tail-hair of cows, king of Sharavati later
Lavana	demon troubling hermitages along the Yamuna and killed by Shatrughna
Lodhra	tree with red and white blossoms, whose pollens were used as face-powder, also called Shalava
Madana	literally, intoxicating; name of god of love
Madhavi	creeper with pink-and-white flowers
Madhoka	tree with red and white blossoms, also called Ashoka
Madhura	city on the Yamuna established by Shatrughna, present Mathura
Magadha	ancient country, now in southern Bihar
Mahakala	a famous Shiva temple in Ujjain, situated on the river Gandhavati

Mahakavya	great or epic work, whose characteristics were listed by the scholar Dandin
Maheshwara	epithet of Shiva
Mainaka	name of a mountain conceived as the son of Himalaya
Maithili	one who is from Mithila where King Janaka ruled, i.e., Sita
Maitra-muhurtha	auspicious duration of 48 minutes; commencing 1 hour and 36 minutes after the rise of Mitra, the Sun-god
Malati	flowering creeper
Malava	a country, possibly modern Malwa in central India
Manahshila	red arsenic
Manasa	name of sacred lake on the mountain Kailasa, now in Tibet
Mandakini	the celestial Ganga, flowing in heaven
Mandakranta	the poetic metre in which Meghadootam was composed
Mandara	name of mountain used by gods and demons as a churning stick when they churned the ocean; one of the five trees in Indra's garden of paradise
Manmatha	deity of love, carrying bow of flowers
Marut	deity of wind

Maruti	super-ape Hanuman devoted to Rama, so-named because born of Maruts, deities of wind
Maryada	prestige
Matali	charioteer of Indra
Matri	divine mothers attending upon Shiva and later, carrying Kumara's embryo
Megha	cloud
Meghanada	Indrajit, son of Ravana
Mena	Himalaya's wife, mother of Parvati and Mainaka
Meru	mountain of gold conceived as the central point of the universe; residence of gods
Mimansa	one of the main schools of Indian philosophy
Mithila	capital of an ancient kingdom called Videha
Munja	kind of rush or grass considered holy, also called Vaneeraka
Naga	serpent
Nagaraja	serpent-king
Naimisha	forest where many sages lived
Naishadha	region around mountain Nishadha in north India
Nalagiri	name of an elephant
Nameru	tree from whose berries rosaries are made, also called Aksha
Nandana	celestial pleasure-garden of Indra
Nandi	humped bull on which Shiva rides

Nandigrama	village where Bharata stayed during Rama's banishment
Nandini	mythical cow of Vashishttha's
Narada	great deified sage, devotee of Vishnu, creator of *veena* or the Indian lute
Narmada	sacred river originating in the Vindhya mountains
Nava	nine
Navas	the month of Shravana
Navashashibhrit	Shiva
Neevara	rice growing wild
Nichaih	low hill near Vidisha
Nichula	cane
Nipa	a tree, also named Kadamba, which blossoms in the rains
Nirvindhya	a river
Nishadha	mountain in north India lending its name to the region around it, Naishadha; also, Kusha's grandson
Oshadhi	medicinal herbs
Oshadhiprastha	mythical capital of Himalaya's kingdom, containing medicinal herbs
Padma	lotus
Palasha	tree with bright orange sickle-shaped flowers blossoming in summer

Panchavati	grove of five sacred fig trees, in a part of the Dandaka forest where Rama stayed for a long time during his exile, near present Nashik in Maharashtra
Pani-grahana	literally, acceptance of hand – in marriage
Pani-peedana	literally, grabbing of hand – same as *pani-grahana*
Paraijata	fabulous flower blooming only in the mythical garden of heaven
Paramatman	the Supreme Soul
Parampara	tradition
Parashu	axe
Parashurama	Rama-with-Parashu, another name of Bhargava
Parvat	mountain
Parvati	literally, of the mountain; daughter of Himalaya and Mena and Shiva's wife
Pavaki	Skanda
Pavananandana	Hanuman
Pitri	departed forefathers
Piyala	name of a tree
Poorva	here, former or earlier part
Pradyot	ancient king, also called Chandamahasena, the father of Vasavadatta, whom Udayana carried away

Prthivi	goddess of Earth
Pushpaka	mythical aerial conveyance, originally Kubera's, but robbed by Ravana and later used by Rama
Raghu	king of the Solar dynasty, an empire-builder, son of Dilipa and father of Aja
Raghuvamsha	Raghu's family-line or dynasty; name of Sanskrit epic by Kalidasa
Rajahamsa	swan
Raksha	protection
Rakshasa	species regarded as demonic and subhuman
Rama	hero of the epic Ramayana, descendant of Raghu and son of Dasharatha and Kaushalya
Ramagiri	hill, called Ramtek now
Rama-rajya	Rama's rule, considered to be ideal
Rantideva	ancient king
Rasa	flavour of Sanskrit poetry, such as Karuna (pathos) and Shringara (romance)
Rati	consort of love-god Madana
Ratiphala	intoxicating and energizing wine
Ratna	gem
Ravana	king of Rakshasas (demons) ruling from Lanka
Reva	river Narmada

Revati	Balarama's consort
Rishyashringa	sage
Rudra	manifestation of Shiva in his terrible aspect
Rudraksha	name of a tree whose dried berries are strung into rosaries, also called Nameru
Sagara	king of a solar race, so-called because he was born affected with poison or *gara*
Samadhi	state of rest achieved through meditation, which holy men often assume when making a conscious decision to die
Sambhava	birth, becoming possible
Sammohana	literally, delusion, mythical weapon causing delusion among the enemy; name of arrow shot by Madana
Sampati	mythical bird, son of Garuda and elder brother of Jatayu
Sandhi	peace-agreement
Sandhya	twilight, conceived as a deity
Saptarshi	group of seven most powerful sages
Sarala	literally, straight; name of variety of pine that quickly catches fire
Sarasvati	goddess of speech and learning; also, name of an ancient river in north India
Sarayu	river on which the ancient kingdom of Koshala and its capital Ayodhya (later Avadh /Oudh) stood

Sarga	canto
Sarika	female parrot believed to be able to speak intelligently
Sati	literally, a virtuous woman or good wife; name of daughter of Daksha
Shakra	Indra, king of gods
Shala	tall and stately tree
Shambhu	Shiva
Shambuka	name of a Shudra slain by Rama
Shaphara	small white, glistening river-fish, which can dart or move fast
Sharabha	mythical deer with eight legs
Sharavati	north of Koshala, ruled by Lava
Sharnga	made out of horn
Sharngapani	Vishnu
Sharngin	Krishna
Shata	hundred
Shatakratu	one who performs a hundred sacrificial ceremonies, title possessed by Indra
Shatrughna	one of Rama's brothers
Shikhara	peak
Shirisha	name of a tree with small, delicate, puff-like flowers

Shiva	one of the three most powerful gods in Hindu mythology, Hara, Navashashibhrit, Shuli, Ardhendumouli
shmashana-shula	poles/stakes planted in cremation-grounds for impaling criminals – an unclean object
Shudra	lowest of the four castes
Shuli	bearer of the trident, Shiva
Shurpanakha	Rakshasa-princess, sister of Ravana
Shyama	a dark woman; a slender woman; a delicate creeper, also called Priyangu
Siddhas	semi-divine creatures supposedly with special powers; sages or seers in general
Sindhu	kingdom adjacent to Kekaya, river Nirvindhya
Sipra	name of a river
Sirisha	big tree with light fluffy blossoms
Sita	adopted daughter of Janaka, the king of Mithila, wife of Rama
Sitamani	crystals
Skanda	Kartikeya
Smara	another name for Madana
Sthalakamala	lotus growing on land, flower darkening from white to deep pink as the sun progresses
Sudakshina	Dilipa's wife and and Raghu's mother

Sudarshana	last able ruler of Solar dynasty, father of decadent Agnivarna
Sugreeva	king of monkeys, Rama's ally in the Lanka war
Sumitra	youngest of Dasharatha's three queens, mother of Lakshmana and Shatrughna
Sura	deities, gods, superhuman species
Sura	gods or a species of powerful super-humans
Surabhi	mythical cow yielding all that one can desire, mother of Nandini
Surapati	Indra
Surya	Sun-god, father of Vaivasvata Manu who is progenitor of the Solar race that Raghu's dynasty belongs to
Swayamvara	ceremony in which a princess publicly chooses her husband out of assembled suitors
Tadaka	demon disturbing hermitages, killed by young Rama
Tala	palm tree
Tamasa	river flowing through woody regions of Koshala where many hermits stayed
Tapas	austere meditation
Taraka	literally, star; name of a powerful demon
Tilaka	name of tree with beautiful flowers, auspicious mark made on the forehead

Trinabindu	sage
Trinayana	the three-eyed one, Shiva
Triyama	that which has three yamas or parts, the night
Tryambaka	Shiva
Tvashtri	architect of gods, also called Vishvakarman
Ucchaishravas	mythical horse of Indra
Udayana	king of Vatsa, a romantic hero
Udumbara	fig
Ujjaini	ancient capital of the region Avanti
Uma	literally, 'O-don't'; name Parvati acquired
Upama	simile or metaphor
Ushtra	camel
Uttara	latter part, north
Uttarakoshala	northern Koshala
Vachaspati	title indicating mastery over the spoken word
Vaidurjya	lapis lazuli
Vaidurya	literally, 'of Vidura', *i.e.*, lapis lazuli brought from the mountain Vidura
Vajra	thunderbolt, Indra's weapon
Valmiki	sage who sheltered Sita in her exile and composed the epic Ramayana

Vamsha	family-line, lineage, dynasty
Vanadevata	deities of the forest
Vanira	a kind of cane growing by the side of rivers
Vara	boon, bridegroom
Varatanu	sage
Varuna	god ruling over the ocean
Vasanta	spring, personified as the associate of Madana
Vasanta-shree	personification of the splendour of spring
Vasava	Indra
Vashishttha	powerful sage
Vastu	ancient body of ideas about house-building
Vasuki	name of a powerful serpent-king, said to bear the earth upon his hood
Vasundhara	the earth, conceived as a goddess
Vatsa	a kingdom in Avanti
Veena	the Indian lute, an ancient stringed musical instrument
Veerasana	one of the prescribed postures of meditation
Vetravati	name of a river
Vibheeshana	brother of Ravana, king of Lanka after Ravana

Vidarbha	ancient kingdom
Vidisha	name of the capital of a region called Dasharna
Vidura	name of a mountain (or city) from which lapis lazuli is brought
Vidyadhara	superhuman species, with special talents, living in high altitudes
Vijaya	name of Parvati's close companion
Vijayalakshmi	goddess of victory
Vikramaditya	king of Ujjayini
Vindhya	a mountain range
Viradha	rakshasa killed by Rama
Vishala	a city in the region of Avanti
Vishvajit	sacrificial ceremony performed by a world-conquerer or emperor
Vishvamitra	powerful sage, also called Kaushika
Vivasvata Manu	seventh and current one of the Manus (who are supposed to be successive progenitors or sovereigns of the earth), son of the Sun and father of the present species of humans
Yadu	chief of cowherd clan into which Krishna was born
Yaksha	mythical creatures serving Kubera at Kailasa
Yama	god of death, unit of time, three yamas make up the night, called triyama

Yamuna	important river of north India, meeting the Ganga at Prayag in Uttar Pradesh
Yamuna	sacred river of northern India, also called Kalindi
Yashovardhana	king of Malava, historical figure
Yava	barley
Yoga	communion with the Supreme Soul through exercise and self-control
Yudhajit	king of Kekaya, sister of Kaikeyee, uncle of Bharata
Yupa	U-shaped wooden structure embedded on the ground, upon which the neck of the animal being sacrificed was placed
Yuvaraja	heir-apparent

Indology/Literature

kalidasa's trilogy

Kalidasa's Trilogy consists of three of Kalidasa's poetical works: *Meghadootam*, *Kumarasambhavam* and *Raghuvamsham*.

The book starts by introducing Kalidasa to the readers and goes on to introducing his above mentioned works. Then the three stories are presented, not as a literal translation from Sanskrit, but as an adaptation in English prose highlighting the beauty of Kalidasa's poetry at every step. Except for *Meghadootam*, which is an original tale of a Yaksha pining for his wife and sending a love-message through a cloud; Kalidasa has drawn from older sources like the Puranas and Ramayana for his other works. *Kumarasambhavam* is about Shiva and Parvati. *Raghuvamsham* is about a royal family, the Suryavamsha, the family of Rama of Ramayana.

The purpose of this book is to bring to the readers the treasures of Indian classic literature, so that they are able to understand and appreciate its beauty and are encouraged to read the original works.

Dipavali Debroy is a lecturer in Delhi University. Life Member of Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute (B.O.R.I.), Pune, she is the co-author (with husband Bibek Debroy) of various research papers published in the Annals of B.O.R.I. Dipavali and Bibek have also authored abridged translations of the Puranas, Vedas and Upanishads. A prolific writer for all age groups, this is her first book in the series on Kalidasa's work.

SMRITI BOOKS®
mail@smritibooks.com
Rs 175.00

ISBN 81-87967-70-6
9 788187 967705

TW-451-986